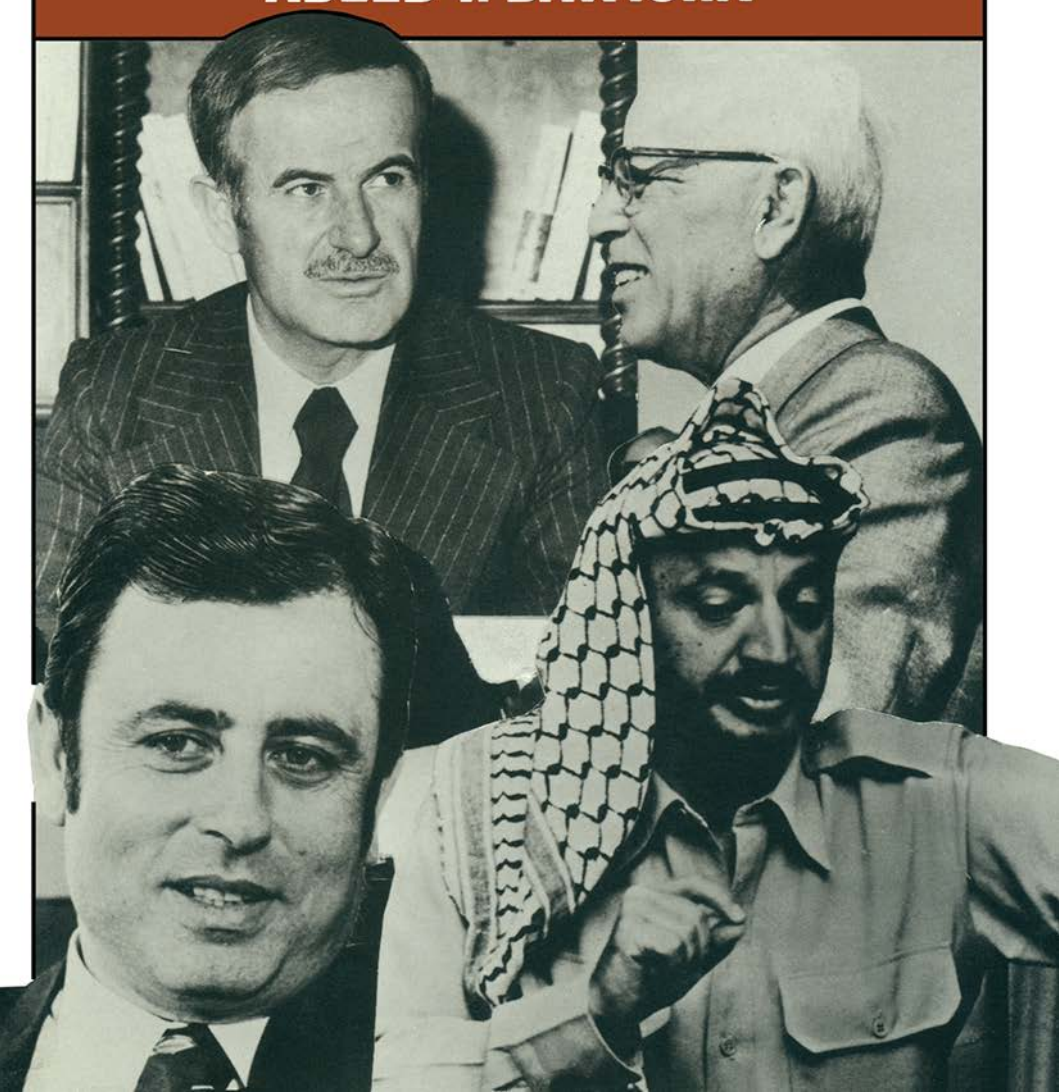
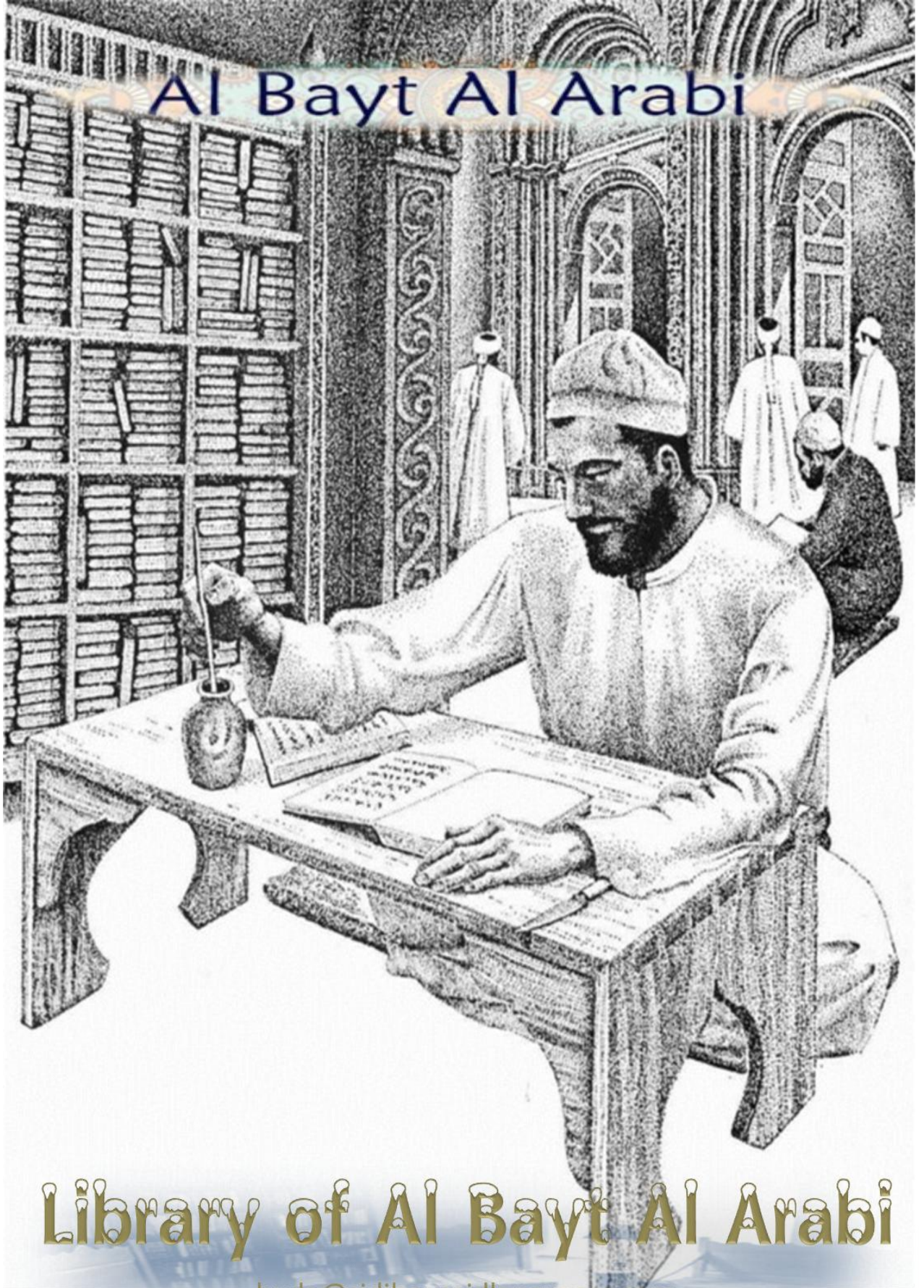


SYRIA AND THE LEBANESE CRISIS

ADEED I. DAWISHA



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for Security**

SYRIA AND THE LEBANESE CRISIS

Adeed I. Dawisha

Assistant Director of Studies

The Royal Institute of International Affairs



FOR KAREN

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Preface

As an associate volume of the International Crisis Behaviour Project (ICB), this book endeavours to analyse Syria's decision-making process in relation to Lebanon's civil war. The assumption underlying the study is that the civil war constituted a 'crisis situation' for Syria's foreign policy-making élite. The Syrian decision-makers perceived the domestic conflict in Lebanon as a clear and ominous threat to fundamental Syrian values that had to be defended at all times, even at the risk of military involvement. Crisis in this respect is conceived as a three-stage process, beginning with the inception of the crisis (the pre-crisis period), its peak (the crisis period), and its decline (the post-crisis period).

The book begins by setting out the methodological underpinning of the study. However, before moving on to analysing Syria's behaviour towards the Lebanese conflict, the historical and institutional setting of the crisis actor, Syria, is elaborated. This is done in Part One of the book, comprising Chapters 2 and 3. Parts Two, Three and Four, consisting of Chapters 4 to 9 are devoted to the analysis of Syria's decision-making behaviour during the crisis as it unfolded in its three stages: the pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis periods. In the concluding Part Five, Chapter 10 endeavours to posit a number of generalisations arrived at through an analysis of the psychological environment, the coping mechanisms, and the process of choice of Syria's decision-making élite, and Chapter 11 examines the subsequent development of Syrian policies in Lebanon. The book, therefore, has two intellectual concerns: the theoretical analysis of crisis behaviour and the empirical study of Syria's political system and decision-making process. Each is meant to complement, without taking precedence over, the other.

It is obvious that a book of this kind would not have seen the light of day had it not been for the support and encouragement of many people. In this respect, no one has done more than the

director of the ICB project, Professor Michael Brecher of McGill University. In the three years of our association over this project, Professor Brecher patiently and diplomatically persevered with the ups and downs of this study. To say that the final product is better as a result of his rigorous thinking would not do justice to Professor Brecher's immense contribution to this book. I am also greatly indebted to the Canada Council who provided generous funds towards the completion of the book. Similar gratitude is extended to the many Syrians who were willing to broaden my knowledge of the characteristics of their country's decision-making process in general and specifically in relation to the Lebanese civil war. Their frankness and willingness to discuss with me in some instances very sensitive matters were particularly gratifying, especially as a number of people in England, citing the 'secretive' and 'conspiratorial' nature of the Syrian political system, had given this study very little chance of ever being completed. I am thus greatly indebted to Syria's Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Mr Adnan Omran, who in an informal three-hour meeting in early 1977 convinced me, by his candid and forthright manner, that the study was not just credible, but also possible. He was also directly involved in facilitating for me the initial contacts in Damascus which led to a number of formal and informal interviews, without which this book would not have been possible. Of these I would like to particularly mention the assistance, service and information extended to me by the Director of Information at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr Haseeb Al-Istiwni, who was always the perfect diplomat, and who in the process became a good friend.

Of the many others who gave generously of their time, I would like to mention the Syrian Minister of Information, Mr Ahmad Iskander Ahmed, the President's Adviser on Foreign Affairs, Dr Adib al-Dawoodi, the Deputy Foreign Minister during 1977-8, Dr Abdulla al-Khani, the present Deputy Foreign Minister, Mr Nasir Qadoor, the Director-General of the West European Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dr Rafiq Jweijati, the Director-General of the Arab Affairs Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr Mohammed Khidhr, the Director-General of the East European Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr Adnan Nashabi, and the Director of External Relations at the Ministry of Information, Mr Zuhair Jinan. For their assistance and 'general

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My thanks also go to Mr Samir Muttawi, who first introduced me to the Syrian Ambassador in London, and was thus instrumental in launching this project, and to Mr Mikhail Wahba of the Syrian Embassy in London who helped immeasurably, particularly in the provision of documents and written material. I am also indebted to Mr Albert Hourani and Dr Roger Owen, both of St Antony's College, Oxford, for their valuable comments on part of an earlier draft of the book. Similar thanks go to Professor Moshe Ma'oz of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, who, in a chance meeting at St Antony's College, offered to read the entire manuscript and subsequently made very constructive comments. Moreover, I benefited considerably from discussing various parts of the book in public lectures at the following British academic and research institutions: the Royal Institute of International Affairs, the International Institute for Strategic Studies, St Antony's College, Oxford, the London School of Economics and Political Science, and the University of Reading.

It would, furthermore, be a gross injustice to enumerate the people who helped in this intellectual effort without mentioning the head librarian and staff of the main and press libraries at Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs. I also gratefully acknowledge similar assistance which was extended, often on her own initiative, by Miss Isabel Silver of the library of the International Institute for Strategic Studies. And last but not least my thanks go to Mrs Maureen Simkin and Mrs Betty Appleby of the Department of International Relations, University of Keele, for efficiently typing the manuscript under extreme conditions of stress, which they did not allow to turn into a 'crisis'.

The final acknowledgement, however, must go to my wife, Karen, from whom many of the book's ideas emanated, and to whom the book is dedicated.

ADEED I. DAWISHA

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1 A Methodological Introduction

The study of international relations generally and foreign policy in particular has suffered, until recently, from an excessive concentration on the external activities of the great and medium powers, neglecting in the process the foreign policy behaviour of the countries of the third world.¹ Not only does this undue emphasis on the large, industrialised and organisationally complex states reveal an obvious parochialism on the part of Western scholars, but it also carries an implicit assumption that states with different attributes (e.g. size, population, level of development, etc.) exhibit similar traits in their foreign policy behaviour—that for example an understanding of British foreign policy should by definition, lead to an appreciation of, say, Burmese or Jordanian external relations.

Such an intellectual position lies within the conceptual boundary of the 'Billiard Ball' model of international relations. This model advocates (a) that states are impregnable social units whose domestic environments are clearly and strictly separate from the external milieu, and (b) that unlike internal politics, there are no conflicting domestic interests in the domain of international relations. Rather, states tend to conduct their foreign policies according to a clearly-defined and universally-comprehended 'national interest',² defined in terms of power and prestige. Consequently, since all states follow similar goals, and since external, rather than domestic, variables are the real determinants of states' foreign relations, it naturally follows that the explanation of say British and Jordanian foreign policies can be treated as interchangeable. According to one analyst, such a position 'is merely a reflection of the general assumption of many researchers who maintain a rigid distinction between national and international political systems despite mounting evidence that the distinction is breaking down. If this were not the case, the

tendency to view nation-states as monolithic units whose value systems and internal processes are of secondary importance for understanding their external conduct would not have been upheld for so long.³ The result was a plethora of studies throughout the fifties and sixties which concentrated on the foreign policies of the super powers (USA and USSR) and the great powers (e.g. Britain, France, China, Germany), but which sadly ignored the foreign policy behaviour of developing countries.

As a 'third world region', the Middle East can certainly be classified as one of those 'neglected' areas. Admittedly, a massive amount of literature has been produced on the Arab-Israeli conflict. However, it must be remembered that the conflict constitutes just one specific issue-area of Middle Eastern international relations. Indeed, it could be argued that this over-concentration on Arab-Israeli relations, and the consequent disregard for the other numerous facets of Middle Eastern studies, has been a major factor in retarding the general study of Middle Eastern politics and international relations. This is abundantly clear from the contrast between the volume of literature concerned with the Arab-Israeli conflict and the paucity of works on the foreign policies of Middle Eastern states in general.

Apart from a few biographical works on prominent Middle Eastern leaders, and a number of general surveys of Middle Eastern politics, each containing brief discussions of foreign policy,⁴ systematic studies of the foreign policies of Middle Eastern states did not begin to appear until the late sixties. The process was spearheaded by Michael Brecher's two monumental volumes on Israel's foreign policy,⁵ and although the area is still very sparse, recently published works indicate a growing interest in the foreign policy of the states in the Middle East.⁶

In addition to its parochialism, the study of foreign policy has also, until recently, been primarily concerned with surveying and describing the bilateral and/or multilateral relations of one state with other states in the international system. It is only in the last two decades that foreign policy scholars have consciously endeavoured to infuse into their analyses a more rigorous methodological orientation. Discarding the predominantly descriptive mode of analysis, they began to concentrate on the values, structures and processes of the foreign policy system.⁷

The pioneering break from the traditional historical method

occurred with the insistence that in foreign policy, it was the concept of 'decision-making' rather than the 'state' which constituted the central unit of analysis. It was forcefully argued that as conceptual abstractions states did not 'act' or 'behave' and as such the state was defined 'as its official decision-makers—those whose authoritative acts are, to all intents and purposes, the acts of the state. State action is the action taken by those acting in the name of the state.'⁸ These decision-makers formulate their decisions in accordance with their perceptions of the environment in its external and internal dimensions. Thus, 'all decision-makers may be said to possess a set of images and to be conditioned by them in their behaviour on foreign policy. . . . These images taken together constitute a world view; and this, in turn, creates a general psychological framework for decision-making.'⁹ There is no doubt that these innovative concepts shifted the thrust of foreign policy analysis significantly from the hitherto almost total preoccupation with the *outputs* of the policy and their consequent impact on other actors to the *process* of foreign policy-making 'which results in the selection from a socially defined, limited number of problematic, alternative projects of one project intended to bring about the particular future state of affairs envisaged by decision-makers'.¹⁰ The concept of 'decision' was thus treated as another crucial unit of analysis.

Michael Brecher, upon whose theoretical formulations this study is based,¹¹ has been particularly conscious of the necessity to clarify and elucidate the concept of decision and choice and to indicate the types of decisions that could be analysed. To Brecher a foreign policy decision represented:

. . . the selection, among perceived alternatives, of one option leading to a course of action in the international system . . . a decision is made by identifiable persons authorised by a state's political system to act within a prescribed sphere of external behaviour . . . a decision is an explicit act of choice, which can be located precisely in time and space. It has definable sources within a setting.¹²

Furthermore, decisions were divided into three categories according to a classification based on a combination of three factors—time, a spectrum of initiation-reaction, and a scale of importance.

The three categories were, therefore, conceptualised as *strategic*, *tactical* and *implementing* decisions.

Strategic decisions are irrevocable policy acts, measured by significance for a foreign policy system as a whole. 'Significance' . . . refers to the number of environmental components which receive feedback from the decision, the intensity of those consequences, and the length of time in which the 'fall out' from the decision affects the behaviour of decision-makers or institutions; that is the scope and duration of impact . . . *tactical* decisions are indissolubly linked to strategic (high policy) decisions and are almost always of lesser significance. They may precede, and serve as pre-decisional stages for, a strategic decision . . . or they may follow strategic decisions, from which they logically derive and without which they could not have occurred. . . . The continuous flow of day-to-day foreign policy choices to execute strategic and tactical decisions may be designated *implementing* decisions.¹³

A clear and precise understanding of the concept of decision is essential to this particular study, since it is basically an analysis of Syria's decision-making behaviour during the perceived crisis of Lebanon's civil war. It is also obvious from the title of this work that another imperative facet of the analysis is a rigorous definition of the term 'crisis'. This is because the basic premise underlying this study is that in formulating and implementing their decisions with regard to the Lebanese situation, the Syrian decision-makers were operating under 'crisis' conditions.

Crisis is a term that has tended to denote a multiplicity of meanings primarily because it was considered self-explanatory. Thus, the term has frequently been 'used without explanation and with the tacit assumption that its general meaning will somehow be understood. Unfortunately, the assumption does not appear to be a safe one, and the result is a great deal of confusion about the precise meaning of the concept.'¹⁴ In order to overcome this confusion and the corresponding definitional looseness in the 'heavy popular usage of the word in ordinary discourse',¹⁵ a number of scholars have endeavoured in the last decade or so to rigorously define 'crisis'. One of the first political scientists to do this was Oran Young who identified the characteristics of international crisis as 'a sharp break from the ordinary flow of

politics; shortness of duration; a rise in the perceived prospect that violence will break out; and significant implications for the stability of some system (or pattern of relationships) in international politics'.¹⁶

While this definition is appropriate for describing and explaining the effect of stress on the relations between a number of states, our emphasis in this specific study is on the crisis situation facing the decision-makers of one particular state, namely Syria. In other words, our concern is with a *foreign policy crisis* rather than an *international crisis*.¹⁷ Within this single actor perspective, the most widely accepted definition is the one forwarded by Charles Hermann:

a crisis is a situation that (1) threatens high priority goals of the decision-making unit, (2) restricts the amount of time available for response before the decision is transformed, and (3) surprises the members of the decision-making unit by its occurrence . . . underlying the proposed definition is the hypothesis that if all three traits are present then the decision process will be substantially different than if only one or two of the characteristics appear.¹⁸

Building upon this pioneering effort, Brecher endeavoured to refine the Herman definition by applying certain modifications and changes to some of its constituent conceptual elements. Thus Brecher offered the following more elaborate definition:

In conceptual terms,

. . . a foreign policy crisis is a situational change in the external or internal environment which creates in the minds of the incumbent decision-makers of an international actor a perceived threat from the external environment to the basic values to which a responsive decision is deemed necessary.

In operational terms,

. . . a foreign policy crisis is a breakpoint along the peace-war continuum of a state's relations with any other international actor(s). A crisis is a situation with four necessary and sufficient conditions, as these are perceived by the highest-level decision-makers of the actor concerned:

- (1) a change in the external or internal environment, which generates
- (2) a threat to basic values, with a simultaneous or subsequent
- (3) high probability of involvement in military hostilities, and the awareness of
- (4) a finite time for their response to the external value threat.¹⁹

This definition of crisis is single actor oriented. In other words, it refers to the perceptions and behaviour of the relevant state in a crisis situation. The behaviour of other states and institutions in the international system is conceptualised primarily as inputs influencing the crisis actor. Thus, in this study, the focus of analysis is *Syrian* perceptions and behaviour during the Lebanese civil war.

Finally, it must be noted that during the entire crisis, several choices are apt to be made, and many of these choices will be taken in varying degrees of escalating and de-escalating stress. To specify the changes that take place within the entire time-span of the crisis, a three period model was elaborated: the inception of the crisis (the pre-crisis period), its peak (the crisis period), and its decline (the post-crisis period). In more detail,

The pre-crisis period comprises the events and cumulative perceptions thereof which create the sense of need for foreign policy choice. It is marked off from a preceding non-crisis period by a sudden or conspicuous increase in the volume and/or intensity of perceived threat by decision-makers of the actors under inquiry.

The crisis period begins with a measurably sharp rise in perceived threat and the salience of time, and a perception of the probability of involvement in war at some stage in the conflict, along with (formal or informal) considerations by the decision-makers of known options and a search for other alternatives. It terminates with formal choice(s), that is decision(s) leading to crisis resolution—by war, peace, surrender, or other means.

The post-crisis period begins with an observable decline in perceived threat and/or time salience and/or probability of

war. It terminates with the reduction of intensity of these perceptions towards the preceding non-crisis level.²⁰

Lebanon's Civil War as a Crisis for Syria's Decision-Makers

There is unanimous agreement among political analysts that the Lebanese civil war of 1975–76 began with the bloody events of Sunday, 13 April 1975,²¹ which in a sense was no more than the culmination of years of gradual social dislocation of Lebanese society. Yet to what extent did the civil war in Lebanon form a crucial environmental change for the Syrian decision-makers, and indeed at which stage of the war did the Syrians begin to perceive the war as a 'crisis'. To answer these questions, one must refer to the necessary conditions embodied in the definition of 'crisis'.

While 13 April 1975 ushered the beginning of the civil war, it was only after the formation of the military cabinet on 23 May that the resultant transformation of the initial fighting from a clash between al-Kata'ib²² and some of the Palestinian commandos to a polarisation between the indigenous Christian and Moslem populations of Lebanon, that the events in Lebanon began to constitute an ominous change in the external environment of Syria's decision-makers.²³ This inter-societal confrontation marked the beginning of the 'pre-crisis' period (23 May 1975 to 18 January 1976), as it signalled, for the first time, the real possibility of an actual disintegration of Lebanon. And to the Syrians the unity of Lebanon had always constituted a cherished value that needed to be defended at all times and at all costs. There were two 'phases'²⁴ in the pre-crisis period. Phase one covered the period 23 May to 31 August, 1975. The second phase was ushered in by the conclusion of the Sinai interim agreement on 1 September 1975 and was characterised by a heightened level of threat perception on the part of the Syrian decision-makers. The pre-crisis period will be discussed in Part Two of this study, consisting of Chapters 4 and 5.

While the events in Lebanon during the pre-crisis period were perceived as a threat to Syrian values, the probability of involvement in military operations remained low throughout 1975. During this period the Syrian decision-makers concentrated on the diplomatic instrument to bring the conflicting

parties together. It was only when the Christian forces overran al-Karantina and al-Maslakh, the predominantly Moslem quarters situated inside the 'Christian Heartland', on 18 January 1976 and proceeded to expel the population, that the Syrian decision-makers began to operate under conditions of 'perceived finite time' and to seriously consider military involvement.²⁵ From then until the Leftist²⁶ defeat on 30 September 1976 the situation in Lebanon deteriorated rapidly with one side or the other gaining the upper hand militarily, but with both sides clearly intent on achieving a clear-cut and comprehensive military and political victory. This meant that one of the two warring factions would have had to be totally subjugated, even expelled from Lebanon. This was clearly not acceptable to the Syrians. Consequently, during this period the Syrian decision-makers were almost wholly preoccupied with the situation in Lebanon, often formulating and implementing decisions with the perception of finite time for their response. Thus, the second and third definitional conditions relating to 'the perceived probability of military involvement' and 'the perception of finite time' restricted the perceived 'crisis period' to just over nine months from 18 January 1976 to 30 September 1976.

The crisis period consisted of three distinct phases. Phase one lasted from the onset of the crisis period on 18 January 1976 until 15 March 1976 when the Syrian decision-makers ordered al-Saiqa and PLA troops to halt the advance of the Leftist Lebanese Arab Army against the palace of President Suleiman Franjeh. Until then Syrian policy was clearly supportive of Syria's long-standing allies, the Leftist forces of the Moslem/Palestinian alliance. Phase two lasted from 15 March to 31 May 1976. During this phase the Syrians gradually shifted their allegiance to the Christian/Rightist Forces, culminating in the decision on 31 May to intervene militarily in Lebanon against the Leftist forces. Phase three began with the military intervention and lasted until the end of the crisis period with the comprehensive defeat of the Leftists on 30 September 1976. Part Three of this study, incorporating Chapters 6 and 7 will analyse the crisis period.

The 'post-crisis' period is immediately discernible. The swift and massive victory of the Syrian troops over the Moslem/Palestinian forces in the mountains of Lebanon during 28–30 September 1976 brought about a rapid decline in the level of perceived threat to values and in the level of time constraint. The

'post crisis' period lasted for six weeks, beginning with the defeat of the Leftists on 30 September and ending with the Syrians' complete occupation of Beirut on 15 November 1976. This period consisted of two distinct phases. The first phase began on 30 September and ended with the convening of the mini-summit in Riyadh on 15 October. Phase Two began on 15 October and lasted until the Syrians' complete occupation of Beirut on 15 November 1976. The post-crisis period will be discussed in Part Four of this study in Chapters 8 and 9. However, before embarking on the main analysis of the crisis, the historical and institutional setting of the crisis actor, Syria, must first be elaborated. Part One, with Chapters 2 and 3, is devoted to this task.

NOTES

1. One very recent study which deals with the foreign policies of the third world is Christopher Clapham (ed.), *Foreign Policy-Making in Developing States: A Comparative Approach* (London: Saxon House, 1977).
2. See Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaborations: Essays on International Politics* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1962), particularly chs 1, 6.
3. Bahjat Korany, 'Foreign Policy Models and Their Empirical Relevance to Third World Actors: a Critique and an Alternative', *International Social Science Journal*, vol. 26, no. 1 (1974) p. 70.
4. Such as, Robert Stephens, *Nasser: A Political Biography* (London: Allen Lane, 1971); Majid Khadduri, *Arab Contemporaries: The Role of Personalities in Politics* (London: Johns Hopkins Press, 1973); Malcolm Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal Abd al-Nasser and his Rivals, 1958-1970*, 3rd edn (London: Oxford University Press, 1971); Noah Lucas, *The Modern History of Israel* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974); Peter Mansfield (ed.), *The Middle East: A Political and Economic Survey*, 4th ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1973); Tareq Y. Ismael, *Governments and Politics of the Contemporary Middle East* (Homewood, Illinois: Dorsey Press, 1970).
5. Michael Brecher, *The Foreign Policy System of Israel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972); Michael Brecher, *Decisions in Israel's Foreign Policy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974).
6. For example, A. I. Dawisha, *Egypt in the Arab World: The Elements of Foreign Policy* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1976); Tareq Y. Ismael, *The UAR in Africa: Egypt's Policy under Nasser* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971); Shahram Chubin and Sepehr Zabih, *The Foreign Relations of Iran: A Developing State in a Zone of Great Power Conflict* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1975); Kemal Karpat and contributors, *Turkey's Foreign Policy in Transition, 1950-1974* (Leiden: Brill, 1975); R. D. McLaurin, Mohammed Mughisuddin and Abraham R. Wagner, *Foreign Policy-Making in the Middle East: Domestic Influences on Policy in Egypt, Iraq, Israel and Syria* (London: Praeger Publishers, 1977).

7. Some of these pioneering works are: Richard Snyder, W. H. Bruck and Burton Sapin, *Foreign Policy Decision-Making* (New York: The Free Press, 1962); Glenn Paige, *The Korean Decision: June 24–30, 1950* (New York: The Free Press, 1968); Fred. A. Sondermann, 'The Linkage between Foreign Policy and International Relations', in James N. Rosenau, (ed.), *International Politics and Foreign Policy* (New York: The Free Press, 1961); Joseph Frankel, 'Towards a Decision-Making Model in Foreign Policy', *Political Studies*, vol. 7 (1959); James N. Rosenau, 'Pre-Theories and Theories of Foreign Policy', in R. Barry Farrell (ed.), *Approaches to Comparative and International Politics* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1966); K. J. Holsti, *International Politics: A Framework for Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967); David O. Wilkinson, *Comparative Foreign Relations: Framework and Methods* (Belmont, California: Dickenson Publishing Company, Inc., 1969); Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971); Graham T. Allison and Morton H. Halperin, 'Bureaucratic Politics: A Paradigm and Some Policy Implications', in Raymond Tanter and Richard H. Ullman (eds.), *Theory and Policy in International Relations* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972); Michael Brecher, Blema Steinberg and Janice Stein, 'A Framework for Research on Foreign Policy Behaviour', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 13 (1969). Critical literature includes James N. Rosenau, 'The Premises and Promises of Decision-Making Analysis', in James C. Charlesworth (ed.), *Contemporary Political Analysis* (New York: The Free Press, 1967); Charles Reynolds, *Theory and Explanation in International Relations* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972); Michael P. Sullivan, *International Relations: Theories and Evidence* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1976); R. Art, 'Bureaucratic Politics and American Foreign Policy: A Critique', *Policy Sciences*, vol. 4 (1973); S. D. Krasner, 'Are Bureaucracies Important?', *Foreign Policy*, Summer 1972; Lawrence Freedman, 'Logic, Politics and Foreign Policy Processes', *International Affairs*, vol. 52 (1976); A. I. Dawisha, 'Foreign Policy Models and the Problem of Dynamism', *British Journal of International Studies*, vol. 2 (1976); Stephen Andriole, Jonathan Wilkenfeld and Gerald Hopper, 'A Framework for the Comparative Analysis of Foreign Policy Behaviour', *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 19 (1975); Hyam Gold, 'Foreign Policy Decision-Making and the Environment: The Claims of Snyder, Brecher and The Sprouts', *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 22 (1978).
8. Snyder *et al.*, op. cit., p. 65.
9. Brecher op. cit. (1972), pp. 11–12.
10. Snyder *et al.*, op. cit., p. 90.
11. These include Michael Brecher, Blema Steinberg and Janice Stein, 'A Framework for Research on Foreign Policy Behaviour', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 13 (1969), pp. 75–101; Brecher, op. cit. (1972); Brecher, op. cit. (1974); Michael Brecher, 'Towards a Theory of International Crisis Behaviour: A Preliminary Report', *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 21 (1977), pp. 39–74; and Michael Brecher, *Decisions in Crisis: Israel 1967, 1973* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

12. Brecher, op. cit. (1974), p. 1.
13. Ibid., pp. 2–3. In his recent book, *Decisions in Crisis: Israel 1967, 1973*, Brecher went beyond these initial formulations. He posited a number of choice patterns, each of which was a composite of choice dimensions. These dimensions included the core inputs, cost, importance, complexity, systemic domain, activity and novelty of the choice, and the mental process associated with choosing the selected option. Nevertheless, in this author's opinion, the earlier definition of strategic, tactical and implementing decisions continue to retain much conceptual value in helping to differentiate decisions along the three specified spectrums.
14. Oran R. Young, *The Intermediaries: Third Parties in International Crises*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 9, quoted in Phil Williams, *Crisis Management: Confrontation and Diplomacy in the Nuclear Age* (London: Martin Robertson, 1976), p. 20.
15. Charles McClelland, 'Crisis and Threat in the International Setting: Some Relational Concepts' (typescript), quoted in Brecher, op. cit. (1977) p. 40.
16. Oran R. Young, *The Politics of Force: Bargaining during Super-power Crisis* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 15, quoted in Williams, op. cit., p. 25.
17. The distinction is drawn by Williams, op. cit., pp. 21–7. This distinction corresponds to the analytical difference between the decision-making and systemic approaches, as elaborated in Charles F. Hermann (ed.), *International Crises: Insights from Behavioural Research* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1972), pp. 6–17.
18. Charles F. Hermann, 'International Crisis as a Situational Variable', in James N. Rosenau (ed.), *International Politics and Foreign Policy*, 2nd ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1969), p. 414, quoted in Brecher, op. cit. (1977), p. 42.
19. Brecher, op. cit. (1977), pp. 42–4.
20. Ibid., pp. 57–8.
21. See for example, Kamal S. Sahbi, *Crossroads to Civil War: Lebanon, 1958–1976* (London: Ithaca Press, 1976), pp. 97ff.; and John Bulloch, *Death of a Country: The Civil War in Lebanon* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), pp. 37ff.
22. Munazzamat al-Kata'ib al-Lubnaniya (The Lebanese Phalange Organisation). A Maronite Christian organisation with a well-armed militia of some 40,000 members. Al-Kata'ib was the best organised and most effective of all the Christian forces during the civil war of 1975–6. For a succinct account of the organisation's history, ideology and policies, see Michael W. Suleiman, *Political Parties in Lebanon: The Challenge of a Fragmented Political Culture* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 232–60; see also Frank Stoakes, 'The Supervigilantes: The Lebanese Kataeb Party as Builder, Surrogate and Defender of the State', *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 11 (1975) pp. 215–36.
23. Interviews with Mr Ahmad Iskander, the Syrian Minister of Information, 13 January 1978; with Dr Adib al-Dawoodi, the President's Adviser on Foreign Affairs, 12 January 1978; and with Dr Abdulla al-Khani, the Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister, 7 January 1978. See also Salibi, op. cit., p. 108.
24. 'Phase' is a sub-category of 'period' and refers 'to time divisions within the

crisis period proper'; see Brecher, op. cit. (1977), p. 57.

25. President Hafiz al-Assad, *Speech Delivered before a General Plenum of Local Government, 20 July 1976* (Damascus: The Baath Arab Socialist Party, 1976), pp. 24–6.
26. Throughout this book, the term 'Leftists' will refer to the Lebanese Moslems/Palestinian alliance, and the three terms will be used interchangeably. Admittedly, the terms are not precisely congruent, nevertheless, for our own purposes, where the focus of the analysis is Syria's decision-making and not Lebanon, the terms are sufficiently approximate not to invalidate the designations. This is especially the case as these designations were paramount in Syrian perceptions. The same argument applies to the use of the term 'Rightists' as denoting the Christian, especially Maronite, forces. The various contending factions in the civil war in Lebanon during 1976 are set out below:

Christians/Rightists Led by the Maronite Subcommune

1. The Phalanges under the leadership of Pierre Gemayel.
2. El-Numour (the Tigers)—the armed forces of the Free National Party—under the leadership of Camille Chamoun.
3. The Liberation Army of Zghorta under the leadership of President Suleiman Franjeh.
4. The Cedar Guards Front—a right-wing militant group—under the leadership of Dr. Fuad Shimaali.
5. The Maronite Monasteries Organisation under the leadership of Father Charbel Cassis.
6. The Forces of Colonel Antoine Barakat—a faction of the Lebanese army which works closely with Christian irregulars.
7. The Tashnaq Party—an Armenian rightist organisation whose paramilitary units operate closely with the Phalanges.

The Pro-Syrian Forces

1. Al-Saiqa, a component of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) under the leadership of Zuhair Muhsin who is the head of the military Department of the PLO and a strong rival to PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat. Muhsin is also an executive member of the Syrian Baath Party.
2. The Palestine Liberation Army (PLA) under the leadership of General Mishaah Boudiri. The PLA receives its military supplies from the Syrian general staff.
3. The Lebanese Ba'ath Party under the leadership of Isam Kanzo.

The Pro-Arafat Forces

1. Fatah under the leadership of Arafat—the largest Palestinian component of the PLO.
2. The Arab Liberation Front (ALF) under the leadership of Abdel Wahhab Kayyali. It receives its military supplies from the Ba'ath Party of Iraq.
3. The PLA unit of Ain Jalut—under the control of Egypt.
4. The Popular Front factions which include (1) the Popular Front/General Command (PFGC) of Ahmad Jibril, (2) the

Revolutionary Front of Wadi Haddad, (3) the Marxist Popular Democratic Front (PDFLP) of Nayef Hawatmah, and (4) the PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) of Dr George Habash.

The Moslems/Leftists

1. The Progressive Socialists under the leadership of Kamal Jumblatt—including Druze, Moslem, and Greek Orthodox.
2. The National Socialist Party (The Syrian Party) under the leadership of Inaam Raid. Under the influence of Libya.
3. The Communist Party under the leadership of George Hawi. Under the influence of the Soviet Union.
4. The Nasserite factions which include (1) The Reformist Movement Organisation—loyal to Egypt—under the leadership of Isam Al-Arab, (2) The Socialist Union—its leader unknown, (3) the Nasserite Forces (or Union of National Workers' Forces) under the leadership of Jajah Wakim and Kamal Shatila which are under the influence of Libya, and (4) El-Murabitun (or independent Nasserites) under the leadership of Ibrahim Quleilat.
5. The 24th of October Movement under the Leadership of Farouk El-Muqaddam.

The Lebanese Armed Forces

1. Christian faction under the leadership of Colonel Antoine Barakat mainly stationed in the Mount Lebanon region.
2. Moslem factions: (1) The Lebanese Arab Army under the leadership of Lieutenant Ahmed Khatib, which[was] in control of the north, east and south regions of Lebanon and coordinate[d] its activities with Jumblatt and Arafat, and (2) the Army units of Brigadier General Aziz Ahdab in Beirut. Both Ahdab and Khatib [were] members of the Revolutionary Council which [was] headed by Ahdab.

SOURCE

Enver M. Koury, *The Crisis in the Lebanese System: Confessionalism and Chaos* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1976) pp. 79–80.

Part One

The Setting

2 The Historical Setting

Considering that the Syrian decision to intervene militarily in Lebanon was an infringement of the sovereignty of a fully independent neighbouring state, the wide-ranging support accorded to the Syrian action was indeed surprising. Approval was voiced by a substantial segment of Lebanese society, the international community at large, and particularly the United States, with the muted acquiescence of Syria's bitterest antagonist, Israel—all of whom perceived the Syrian intervention as the only remaining alternative which could save Lebanon from anarchy and the inevitable disintegration of the country's social and political systems. Yet Syria's intervention was also deeply rooted in the history of the region. This was so not only because the religious and communal tensions and cleavages which lay at the heart of the recent Lebanese civil war had been operative for over a hundred years, but also because these tensions in Lebanon invariably induced similar eruptions in other parts of Syria, for until recently that area was perceived to be a single geographical and social entity.¹ Thus, a civil war in 1860 between the Christian Maronites and the Druzes in Lebanon, which ended in a series of defeats for the Christians, sparked off a massacre of Christians by Moslems in neighbouring Damascus.

By the end of the Ottoman period Syria was divided into the *vilayets* of Aleppo, Damascus and Beirut, and the *mutasarrifiyas* of Jerusalem and Mount Lebanon; this last was created after the civil war of 1860, when the Ottoman government, by agreement with the European powers, gave the district a privileged status under a Christian governor. Moreover, the governor was to be assisted by an administrative council consisting of four Maronites, three Druzes, two Orthodox Christians, one Melkite, one Shii Moslem and one Sunni Moslem.² From this institutionalisation of confessionalism up to the present day the

sectarian system has dominated (many would say 'plagued') the structure and behaviour of Lebanon's internal politics, as well as the country's relations with its neighbours and the world at large.

The defeat of the Ottomans in the First World War, and the subsequent post-war settlement which divided the area between British and French spheres of influence, only exacerbated and reinforced communal cleavages. In 1920 the state of 'Greater Lebanon' was established, later to become 'the Republic of Lebanon', including the predominantly Moslem districts of Beirut, Tripoli, Sidon and Tyre, the Beqa' valley, and the area south of Mount Hermon which was inhabited mainly by Shii Moslems. Needless to say these communities were hardly enthusiastic about living under Maronite control, and as a result many of them persisted in perceiving themselves as 'Syrians' rather than 'Lebanese', and continued to look towards the 'mother country' for inspiration and protection.³

What was left of Syria was subsequently partitioned along religious and communal lines. The area around Latakia became an autonomous Alawi state, and Jebel Druze was also granted independence. The rest of the country was divided into two autonomous administrative governments, Damascus and Aleppo, but then was united in 1924 to form the State of Syria. These governments were under the general supervision and control of a French High Commissariat. However, according to the League of Nations Permanent Mandates Commission, these divisions 'gave the impression of a country which had been parcelled out'.⁴

The period of French mandate over Syria and Lebanon seems to have been accepted mainly by some of the minorities, in particular the Maronites, but many of them were later to turn against the French in an effort to expand their increasing mercantile and commercial activities beyond the restrictive domain of the mandate system. The greater part of the Syrians, on the other hand, had constantly and vehemently opposed the French mandate. This era witnessed numerous local uprisings, and in 1925 a general revolt erupted, in which a provisional Syrian government was established. It took the French two years of military activity, which included the indiscriminate bombing of Damascus on two occasions, to crush the revolt.

Nonetheless, popular discontent persisted until in 1936 France signed separate treaties with Syria and Lebanon which provided

for the transfer of political authority to national elements, the entry of the two countries into the League of Nations, and the incorporation of Jebel Druze and the Alawi states into Syria. The French parliament, however, refused to ratify the treaties, a decision that led to the renewal of strikes, demonstrations, riots and mass arrests that generally continued until 1943, when the Free French administration, under pressure from the British, reluctantly allowed general elections to be held in Lebanon and Syria. In both countries nationalist governments took office, declaring their intention to terminate the mandates and achieve full and real independence.⁵ This goal was finally attained in 1946 with the complete withdrawal of France from the two countries.

During the fifties, the Lebanese adhered to the tenets of the 'National Pact', which was formulated by Bishara al-Khoury and Riadh al-Sulh, the two 'founders' of modern Lebanon, and which was designed to orient Lebanese politics towards a compromise situation amongst the various communities. The pact distributed top governmental and administrative posts and parliamentary seats among the various communities in proportion to their numbers in the population.⁶ The first decade of Lebanese independence passed relatively peacefully. The *laissez-faire* economic policies of the government attracted massive Arab and foreign capital into the country, which when added to the Lebanese natural commercial and mercantile instincts, contributed to the country's marked prosperity during this period. Economic well-being, however, did not eliminate sectional cleavages; it only succeeded in keeping these structural conflicts dormant. Indeed, the increasing polarisation in the Arab world during the fifties between the Nasserite 'Arab nationalist' and 'pro-Western' forces began to affect the attitudes of Lebanon's communities towards each other, particularly after President Camille Chamoun publicly sided with the 'pro-West', 'anti-Nasserist' camp.

Meanwhile Syria had become one of the leading members of the 'nationalist camp' in the Arab world. After a period of military rule, Syria's return to parliamentary government in 1954 was marked by the emergence of nationalist, left-of-centre elements.⁷ The most active group among these was the Arab Baath Party whose ultimate goal was the establishment of a united, democratic and socialist Arab republic, and whose central slogan was: 'One Arab nation with an eternal mission.'⁸ The

Baath's aspirations for a united Arab state naturally centred on Egypt, the most important country, and its President Gamal Abd al-Nasser, the most charismatic and popular in the Arab world. In 1956 Syria announced its intention to negotiate a federal union with Egypt, and as a first step a joint military command was established and a customs and economic union was agreed on. Syria became Egypt's staunchest ally in the latter's struggle against pro-Western Iraq for the leadership of the Arab world. With the Baath's increasing influence in the Government and Army, and among the urban professional classes and the intelligentsia, Syrian agitation for union with Egypt was maintained throughout 1957. In January 1958 the Syrian Chief of Staff led a delegation of fourteen high-ranking army officers to Cairo to try to persuade Nasser to accept some form of unity with Syria, and a week later Syria's Baathist Foreign Minister joined the officers for the talks with Nasser.⁹ The Syrian initiative and pressure finally paid dividends when the United Arab Republic (UAR), incorporating Egypt and Syria under Nasser's Presidency, was announced on 1 February 1958.

The establishment of the first United Arab Republic in modern history acted as a catalyst for the further polarisation of Lebanon's confessional and sectarian society. The domestic tensions which had remained dormant throughout the fifties were suddenly brought into the open by this new environmental change. Thus, in the days immediately following UAR announcement, the Moslem communities in Lebanon enthusiastically celebrated the occasion by closing schools, holding thanksgiving prayers and demonstrating in the streets despite governmental bans. Delegation after delegation crossed over to Syria to congratulate its leaders on the 'historic decision' and were told by ex-President Quwatly of Syria that Lebanon was invited to join whenever she so wished. The Christian community, however, was simultaneously and feverishly reiterating its faith in, and hopes for, the continuation of Lebanon's sovereignty and independence. Both President Chamoun and Charles Malik, Lebanon's Foreign Minister insisted that they would do everything in their power to maintain the country's national integrity and to 'save' it from external threats and influences. The increasing polarisation between the two communities was to erupt into an anarchic and violent civil war in May 1958,¹⁰ which lasted for over months.

It is now accepted that the Syrian authorities extended some

military and logistical support to the Moslem nationalists during that civil war. More effectively, the UAR, through its radio services, including Radio Damascus, engaged in an intensive propaganda campaign against the Lebanese Government generally and President Chamoun personally. The civil war resulted in a 'gain' for the UAR and its President. Chamoun was replaced as President by General Fuad Shihab, the universally respected and strictly non-partisan Chief of Staff of the Lebanese Army, and Rashid Karami, one of the nationalist leaders, became Prime Minister. It soon became clear that Lebanon's foreign policy would soon revert back to the pre-Chamoun period, with somewhat greater emphasis on Arab involvement.

More importantly, the Shihab Presidency brought stability to Lebanon's domestic politics. He expanded the Parliament from seventy-seven to ninety-nine members, yet maintained the National Pact ratio of six to five in favour of the Christians. He thus placated the Christians by keeping the parliamentary balance in their favour, while simultaneously satisfying the Moslems' demands for wider political participation by increasing their absolute numbers in Parliament. Moreover, by decreasing his contacts with the traditional politicians and relying instead on a cadre of competent and efficient civil servants, Shihab minimised the perceived importance of the traditional politicians, thus making their sectarian conflicts seem like petty squabbles.

The semblance of national unity created by Shihab continued through the first half of the succeeding Presidency of Charles Helou. Until the major defeat suffered by the Arab armies in June 1967, Lebanese political and social conditions remained stable. The June war, however, introduced a new input into Arab politics which was ultimately to shatter the fragile communal peace in Lebanon that Shihab had laboriously built: this new variable was the Palestinian guerrillas.

The rapid growth in the power and prestige of the guerrillas, particularly after the 'battle of Karameh',¹¹ had by 1969 established the Palestinian Resistance as a separate, quasi-independent political and military force in Lebanese politics. This naturally tended to exacerbate the dormant, yet potent, communal conflicts. Most Christians resented what they perceived to be an inexcusable infringement of Lebanese sovereignty by the Palestinians, whereas the majority of the Moslems felt that Lebanon was duty-bound to extend all possible support to the

Palestinians. These conflicts were later reinforced as a result of Israel's adoption of a policy of instant and punitive retaliation against countries harbouring Palestinian guerrillas. Israeli shelling of Lebanese border villages and incursions into Lebanese territory became a regular occurrence, and in December 1968 an Israeli helicopter-borne commando raid on Beirut airport destroyed thirteen aircraft belonging to Lebanese civil airlines. The raid was a reprisal for an attack two days earlier on an El Al plane by two guerrillas who, the Israelis claimed, lived and trained in Lebanon.

Israel's military operations against Lebanon further eroded the fragile communal peace in Lebanon. Christian hostility towards the Palestinians grew considerably, as the latter were blamed for Israel's incursions into Lebanon, and in April 1969 the inevitable happened. The Christian-dominated Lebanese Army clashed with units of al-Saiqa guerrilla groups which had infiltrated from Syria. The Palestinians suffered considerable losses, and as a result serious rioting broke out in Beirut and other towns. During the summer and autumn of 1969 further clashes between the Lebanese Army and the guerrillas occurred, creating a near-crisis situation which threatened to produce a second civil war. This was temporarily averted in November when Yasir Arafat and the Commander-in-Chief of the Lebanese Army signed an agreement in Cairo which limited the movements of the guerrillas inside Lebanese territory, prohibited military training in refugee camps, and restricted the guerrillas' military activity to Israeli-held territory only. While the agreement did produce an immediate calm, the threat of civil war was renewed in March 1970 when clashes between the guerrillas and the Right-wing Christian Phalangists resulted in heavy losses for the Palestinians.

When Suleiman Franjeh was elected to the Presidency in August 1970, therefore, the country's domestic situation had deteriorated to such an extent that it was practically unrecognisable from the tranquil Lebanon of the Shihab period. The situation grew worse a month later with the arrival in Lebanon of thousands of Palestinian guerrillas fleeing Jordan in the wake of their crushing defeat by the Jordanian Army. It was during that war, 'black September' for the PLO, that Syria launched a short-lived and unsuccessful military intervention on the side of the Palestinians.¹² The ensuing fiasco constituted a major factor in General Hafiz al-Asad's decision to carry out a bloodless coup in

November 1970, which installed him as the paramount leader of his country, and the key personality in its ruling Baath Party.

The Baath Party had assumed power in Syria through a military coup in February 1963. Through a tactical alliance with other nationalist groups, Baathist officers ousted the conservative regime which was primarily responsible for the Syrian secession from the UAR in 1961. In the months immediately following the coup, the Baathist officers skilfully consolidated their power *vis-à-vis* the other groups in the decision-making structure. One by one the non-Baathist members of the political and military leadership were either demoted, expelled, dismissed or exiled, so that by July 1963 the Baath Party had assumed complete political control. From within the party's ranks, General Amin al-Hafiz emerged as Syria's strong man, inaugurating a period of authoritarian and repressive control, particularly against feudalists, merchants and industrialists who were hard hit by the regime's nationalisation and agrarian reform measures.

These measures were a sure sign of the Party's gradual drift towards the Left under the growing radical influence of General Salah Jadid who had earlier resigned his post as Chief of Staff, preferring instead to concentrate on party mobilisation. As the political and ideological split between Hafiz and Jadid grew, the latter proceeded to use his sensitive position as Assistant Secretary-General of the Party's Regional Command to undermine Hafiz's power base in the party. When Hafiz belatedly tried to outmanoeuvre his rival by dissolving the National Guard (a para-military group that owed its allegiance to the Party's Regional Command) and transferring a number of Jadid's followers in the Army, the latter, with the help of other disaffected officers, executed a successful, albeit bloody, coup in February 1966.¹³

The new leadership contained three neo-marxist civilians, the President, Dr Nur al-Din Atassi, Prime Minister Dr Yusif Zuayen and Foreign Minister Dr Ibrahim Makhous. Real power, however, rested with General Jadid, who continued to act as the Assistant Secretary-General of the Party's Regional Command, and the new Minister of Defence and Commander of the Air Force, General Hafiz al-Asad, both of whom belonged to the minority Alawi Moslem sect. The aggressively Leftist credentials of the new leaders, particularly of the civilians among them, set the Syrian Baathists far apart from the ideological orientation of

the traditional, mainstream Baath leadership. Thus, immediately after the coup, Michel Aflaq, the founder and philosopher of the Baath Party, took it upon himself to accuse the Syrian leaders of deviation from the pure principles of Baathism. He contended that the Syrians were behaving like the communists who once 'demanded Arab acquiescence to British and French imperialism, because these two imperialist powers were at that time the allies of the Soviet Union'.¹⁴ Moreover, exhibiting his exasperation with the Army's continued intervention in politics, he expressed his hope 'to change the function of the army by preventing the officers from forming a bloc inside the leadership of the Party'.¹⁵ The Syrians promptly retaliated by expelling Aflaq and Salah Bitar, the co-founders of the Baath, from the Syrian Party, labelling them 'imperialists' and 'traitors', and later condemning them to death in absentia.¹⁶

The regime's continued domestic and foreign radicalism, and the country's massive and humiliating defeat in the June 1967 war with Israel led to increasing unrest and dissatisfaction among the population. This in turn contributed to a growing dislocation within the ranks of the leadership. The most alarming feature of this situation for the regime was the increasing antagonism between the two strong men of the leadership, General Jadid who insisted on maintaining and furthering the Baath's radical policies, and General Asad who favoured the adoption of a more moderate posture in Syria's domestic politics, as well as in its inter-Arab and international relations. Asad preferred to decrease Syria's growing dependence on the Soviet Union, advocated a *rapprochement* with the new Right-wing Baathist government in Iraq, and strongly supported Syria's participation in Arab summit conferences. Domestically, he called for the establishment of a National Progressive Front, which would enlarge the power-base of the existing Baathist government by the inclusion of communists, Nasserists and other non-Baathist nationalists.

While Jadid-Asad rivalry remained indecisive, the events following the fourth Regional Congress in September 1968 clearly showed the gradual ascendancy of the Asad camp. Zuayen and Makhous, Asad's principal antagonists, were dropped from the Cabinet, and six army officers, including three immediate aides of Asad, were named to the new government. Most importantly, one of Asad's most loyal proteges, General Mustafa

Tlas, became First Deputy Defence Minister. Then, in May 1969, Asad's demands for broadening the Government were realised when a new Cabinet was formed which included Arab nationalists, unionists and independents.

The struggle within the Baathist leadership persisted throughout 1969 and 1970, until the Jordanian civil war in September 1970 brought the conflict to a head. After Syria's unsuccessful intervention on the side of the Palestinians in the war, and the consequent accusations and recriminations, the military, led by Asad who had opposed the intervention on strategic grounds, resolved the ensuing deadlock in November 1970 by occupying the offices of the Party and the popular organisations, neutralising a number of pro-Jadid officers, and arresting the top political leaders. Asad became Prime Minister and Defence Minister, and four months later, he was elected President.

There can be no doubt that under President Asad's rule, Syria has experienced the most stable period in her post-independence history. Upon assuming power Asad immediately began to widen the regime's support base by creating a 'People's Council' which included representatives of all political groups and organisations. A year later, in March 1972, the President created the 'National Progressive Front' which included Baathists, non-Baathist nationalists and communists. This was followed by the formation of a new Cabinet, half of which comprised non-Baathist members. Nevertheless, while broadening popular participation in his regime, Asad was careful not to undermine the political dominance of the Baath. Thus, the charter of the National Progressive Front clearly states that all political activity, except that undertaken by the Baath, is prohibited in the two 'delicate' sections of the population, the armed forces and the educational institutions.¹⁷ Moreover, the ascendancy of the Baath can be seen in the structure of the Syrian Cabinet during the period of the Lebanese civil war from April 1975 to October 1976. In that Cabinet, the offices of the Prime Minister and the key ministers of Foreign Affairs, Defence, Economic Affairs, Interior, Information and Education were filled by Baathists.¹⁸

In foreign affairs President Asad moved swiftly to reduce Syria's isolation in the Arab world. Relations with Egypt and Jordan quickly and dramatically improved. Indeed, in September 1971 Syria joined with Egypt, Libya and Sudan in forming the Federation of Arab Republics. While the Federation itself never

became an active force, nevertheless it allowed Syria to participate positively in inter-Arab relations. On the eastern front, Syrian-Jordanian relations grew in cordiality, especially after Asad closed down the Syrian-operated 'Voice of the Palestinian Revolution', whose broadcasts were directed primarily at Jordan. With the Jordanian participation on the Syrian front in the October 1973 war, diplomatic relations between the two countries were resumed.

It was the October war which established President Asad as a major political figure in the Arab world. The close coordination between the Syrian and Egyptian Military High Commands, the successful execution of 'Operation Badr' at least in the initial period of the war,¹⁹ and the improved performance of the Syrian military, went a long way towards eradicating the memories of the June 1967 humiliation, and thus establishing Asad as an authoritative and meritorious leader. The October 1973 experience also convinced the Syrian President that a cohesive and effective 'Eastern Front' was essential in any future encounter with the Israelis, and to this effect he reached an agreement with King Hussein of Jordan to form a joint military and political command in 1975. By this time President Asad had unquestionably established himself in Syria as the central decision-maker. This was more than evident in the ease with which he reshuffled his Cabinet and Army High Command during 1975. However the exercise of this authority was soon to be tested with the eruption of a bloody civil war in neighbouring Lebanon.

In complete contrast to Syria, in Lebanon the seventies proved to be the most turbulent period in its post-independence history. When President Franjeh took office in September 1970, the political, and more importantly attitudinal, polarisation between the Christians on the one hand and the Moslems and their Palestinian allies on the other hand, had already assumed a rigidity which did not bode well for the future unity of the country. As Palestinian incursions into Israel from South Lebanon increased, the Israelis dramatically raised the level of their retaliation, so that by 1972 many villages in South Lebanon had been completely deserted by their inhabitants, the vast majority of whom took up residence in the outskirts of Beirut in ghetto-type shanty towns. These new 'refugees' naturally became 'willing recruits of the ideologically orientated radical groups such as the Communist Party and the Syrian National Party.'²⁰

Since these ideological parties, as well as the Palestinian Movement, drew support from both the Moslem and Christian communities, the divisions in Lebanon began gradually to assume a left *v.* right, rather than a straightforward Moslem *v.* Christian, character. Nevertheless, as pointed out earlier, it is important not to over-exaggerate the ideological nature of the conflict, for it is certainly true that the vast majority of those labelled 'Rightists' were Christians, in the same way that the forces of the Left showed a massive preponderance of Moslems over Christians.

As the polarisation between the conflicting parties continued to increase, an explosion was bound to occur, and it was Israel which sparked it off. On 10 April 1973, a group of Israeli commandos landed in Beirut by sea and assassinated three prominent leaders of the al-Fatah guerrilla group in their apartments in the centre of Beirut, without suffering a single casualty themselves. Indeed, by the time the Lebanese security forces had been alerted, the raiders were already in their gunboats heading back for Israel. Dissatisfied with the Army's impotence, the Lebanese Prime Minister, Saeb Salam, demanded the resignation of the Christian Chief of Staff, which President Franjeh promptly refused to support, thus leaving Salam no option but to resign himself. An acute political crisis followed the resignation of the Sunni Prime Minister who, during his years of office, had effectively averted a headlong clash between the two principal Lebanese religious-ideological factions. The domestic crisis erupted into violence on 2 May, when heavy fighting broke out between the Lebanese Army and the Palestinian guerrillas. For the next two weeks intermittent, yet fierce, clashes occurred, in which the Lebanese Air Force bombarded Palestinian camps around Beirut. Under pressure from the Arab countries, and particularly from Syria which perceived itself as the guardian of the 'Palestinian Revolution', fighting was stopped on 18 May and a settlement was reached which provided for the establishment of a Joint High Commission of the Lebanese Army Command and the Palestinian Resistance Command for the purpose of attending to problems between the two sides. Like the earlier encounter of 1969, this new confrontation had proved similarly inconclusive.

The May 1973 clashes can be treated as the starting point of the civil war which was to follow two years later, that is, an ante-crisis period to the 1975-6 crisis. To the Palestinians, May 1973

provided conclusive evidence of the Christians' determination to liquidate their cause. The tragic experiences of September 1970 were still fresh in their minds, but at least then they had Lebanon as an escape route. Now they had nowhere to go—Lebanon had to be their last stand. Consequently, with the help of Syria, Iraq and Libya, the Palestinians proceeded to strengthen their military capability in terms of recruitment and equipment. On the opposing side, the Lebanese Christians, whose concern about Lebanese sovereignty grew even more acute after May 1973, became convinced that the Palestinian guerrillas and the Leftist forces were intent on imposing Moslem domination over Lebanon. Accordingly, they too began to acquire large quantities of arms for distribution among their own militias for the 'inevitable final encounter'.²¹

Throughout 1974, the Palestinian guerrillas distributed arms and weaponry to their Leftist Moslem allies. As noted earlier, apart from the pro-Syrian and pro-Iraqi Baath parties, the Left in Lebanon included the Lebanese Communist Party and various other communist factions, along with a number of Sunni political factions of Arab nationalist persuasion in Tripoli, Beirut and Sidon.²² These nationalist groups were allied with Kamal Jumblatt's Progressive Socialist Party in a coalition called the National Movement (al-Haraka al-Wataniya), and Jumblatt was recognised as the Movement's foremost leader.

The increasingly bitter antagonism between the Leftists and Rightists in Lebanon was fuelled by Israel's military operations against targets in Southern Lebanon throughout 1974. In April, the Israelis attacked six villages in Southern Lebanon and a month later Palestinian refugee camps were bombed by the Israeli Air Force. In June, 100 people were reportedly killed and 200 wounded in villages and camps in the south as a result of three days of systematic Israeli bombing. The second half of the year and the early part of 1975 witnessed persistent guerrilla attacks against Israeli targets, as well as continued Israeli shelling, troop incursions and air raids into Lebanon.

The tension on the border had a spill-over effect on the general Lebanese situation. The Christians blamed the Israeli attacks and the situation in Southern Lebanon on Palestinian activities and demanded more governmental control of guerrilla operations. Moreover, the Christians deeply resented the growing power of the Palestinians inside Lebanon, where, like Jordan in 1970, a

'state within a state' situation was slowly, yet clearly, emerging. To the Christians, the highly cherished Lebanese sovereignty was being gradually, but surely, undermined. With the continuous and vigorous arming of the various factions, this perceptual hostility was bound to erupt into physical violence. In July 1974 the first clash between the Palestinians and the Kata'ib militia (Phalangists), the strongest and best organised of the Christian forces, occurred. Henceforth, armed confrontations between the two forces were to become a regular occurrence. One such clash in the latter part of the year resulted in the death of 150 people and the wounding of a further 300, in addition to considerable material damage to Beirut. The escalation of the conflict and the rapid deterioration of the security situation in Lebanon continued unchecked during the first three months of 1975. A clash between the Christian-dominated Army and Moslem forces in Sidon in March 1975 resulted in the death of five soldiers and eleven civilians. In the wake of this incident sixteen Moslem leaders, including six former Premiers, demanded the reorganisation of the Army, so that a 'national balance' could be created between Moslems and Christians in the Army Command. Naturally, this was promptly and unequivocally rejected by the Christian leadership. By now the positions of the opposing groups had become completely polarised. A domestic 'cold war' had characterised the political and social interactions of the Lebanese over the last year, and it only required a single incident for the cold war to be transformed into a fully fledged civil war. On Sunday, 13 April, unidentified gunmen killed four members of the Kata'ib Party, whereupon a bus load of Palestinians returning from work was ambushed by Kata'ib militia and all its passengers murdered. It was at this juncture that the civil war in Lebanon and the ensuing crisis for the Syrians began.

NOTES

1. See for example, Stephen H. Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958) pp. 1-6; John B. Glubb, *Syria, Lebanon, Jordan* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1967) pp. 7-9; Tabitha Petran, *Syria* (London: Ernest Benn, 1972) chs 1 and 2; A. H. Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon: A Political Essay* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946) chs 1-4.
2. H. B. Sharabi, *Governments and Politics of the Middle East in the Twentieth*

- Century* (London: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc, 1962) p. 106.
3. See Michael Hudson, *The Precarious Republic: Modernization in Lebanon* (New York: Random House, 1968). In this highly authoritative study, Hudson maintains that the Maronite leaders who sought independence from the mandatory power appreciated 'the urgent necessity of integrating Arab nationalist Sunni notables into the political institutions of the state to preserve its viability once independence was achieved, and it took pains to cultivate the support of these notables and to wean them from rigid insistence that an independent Lebanese entity be merged into a united Syria' (p. 42). Similarly, Enver Koury (op. cit., p. 47) states that in 1943 'the Christian leaders advocated the partition of Lebanon into Christian and Moslem entities, in response to the Lebanese Moslem leaders who were seeking federation in a Greater Syria as the way to avoid partition'. It is also interesting to note that after the Druze-Christian civil war of 1860, the great powers rescued the Maronite community by establishing Lebanon as an autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire. However, this new province was confined only to the Mount Lebanon area, excluding the Sunni-dominated coastal strip, Beirut, the Beqa' and the northern plain.
 4. Quoted in Petran, op. cit., p. 62.
 5. For a good account of this period, see Longrigg, op. cit.
 6. For excellent analyses of the post-war structure of Lebanon's political system, see Hudson, op. cit.; Suleiman, op. cit.; R. Hrair Dekmejian, *Patterns of Political Leadership: Egypt, Israel, Lebanon* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1975) chs 2, 5; David R. Smock and Audrey C. Smock, *The Politics of Pluralism: A Comparative Study of Lebanon and Ghana* (New York: Elsevier, 1975) chs 3, 4, 5; and Leonard Binder, ed., *Politics in Lebanon* (New York: John Wiley, 1966).
 7. By far the best book on this period of Syrian history is Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of Post-War Arab Politics, 1945-1958* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).
 8. A. I. Dawisha, 'The Transnational Party in Regional Politics: The Arab Baath Party', *Asian Affairs*, vol. 61 (1974) p. 23.
 9. See Seale, op. cit., ch. 22.
 10. The best account of the 1958 Lebanese civil war is Fahim I. Qubain, *Crisis in Lebanon*, Washington, D.C.; Middle East Institute, 1961; see also M. S. Agwani, *The Lebanese Crisis: A Documentary Study* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1965).
 11. See Dawisha, op. cit. (1976) pp. 54-5.
 12. For an intimate discussion of the Syrian intervention in the Jordanian civil war and of the ensuing political struggle within the Syrian leadership see Petran, op. cit., pp. 247-9. It is also worth mentioning here that Alan Dowty is preparing a study on the United States' behaviour during the Jordanian civil war as a part of the I.C.B. project.
 13. A good account of this period of Syria's history is Itamar Rabinovitch, *Syria Under the Ba'th, 1963-1966: The Army-Party Symbiosis* (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1972).
 14. *Al-Hayat* (Beirut) 25 February 1966.
 15. Ibid.
 16. Petran, op. cit., p. 182.

17. Dawisha, op. cit. (1974) pp. 27–8.
18. *The Middle East and North Africa, 1976–77* (London: Europa Publications, 1976) p. 673.
19. For an intimate and fascinating account of the Arab planning and execution of the October war, see Mohamed Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan* (London: Collins, 1975).
20. Abbas Kelidar and Michael Burrell, 'Lebanon: The Collapse of a State', *Conflict Studies*, no 74 (August 1976) p. 6.
21. Salibi, op. cit., p. 69; and Bulloch, op. cit., pp. 70–3.
22. Bulloch, op. cit., p. 76.

3 External and Internal Setting

The setting in which foreign policy decisions are taken refers 'to a set of potentially relevant factors and conditions which may affect a state's external behaviour. [It] sets the parameters or boundaries within which decision-makers must act'.¹ The external setting is deemed to consist of five taxonomic variables that exist in the operational environment as part of the real world. These variables signify the 'conditions and relationships which exist beyond the territorial boundaries of states and operate at three distinct levels: Global; Subordinate (Regional) and Subordinate Other; and Bilateral, including Dominant Bilateral'.² In this study, these levels will be collapsed into two categories: the Global and Regional Environments. The internal setting consists of five variables: Military and Economic Capabilities; Political Structure; Interest Groups; and Competing Elites.³ These variables represent the totality of environmental impulses and stimuli which influence decision-making, thus acting as determinants of policy.

The Global Environment

By the early 1970s, the structure of global relations in the Middle East were being conducted along the maxim that local conflicts ought to be contained regionally and not be allowed to spill over into the global arena. This was manifestly evident from the behaviour of both superpowers during the October 1973 war.⁴ Nevertheless, apart from this, superpower competition and rivalry in the Middle East was vigorously pursued on all levels, especially, and most crucially, through the injection of massive military aid, which included the dispatch of sophisticated and lethal military equipment to conflicting states in the region. As

TABLE 3.1 Total arms transfers of major suppliers to selected Middle Eastern States, 1966–75 (million current dollars)

	<i>United States</i>	<i>Soviet Union</i>	<i>Total</i>
Syria	3	1,758	1,905
Israel	3,856	—	4,031
Iraq	2	1,343	1,721
Egypt	—	2,465	2,780
Jordan	400	—	538
Saudi Arabia	473	—	1,038
Total (Middle East)	7,475	6,300	16,452

SOURCE

United States Arms Control and Disarmaments Agency, *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers, 1966–1975* (Washington, D.C.: 1976) p. 78.

can be seen from Table 3.1, the local states, directly or indirectly involved in the Lebanese civil war, were major recipients of arms from the competing global powers.

It is obvious that as far as Syria's foreign policy during the Lebanese civil war was concerned, the dominant relationship was the one that existed with the Soviet Union. As indicated in Table 3.1, Syria had become by 1975 almost totally dependent on the Soviet Union for military hardware. Indeed, according to United States intelligence calculations, the communist superpower dispatched well over \$1,000 million in sophisticated military equipment to Syria between 1974 and 1976.⁵ Nor were good relations confined to the military/security issue area. Contacts between the two countries were varied and multifaceted. Soviet economic and technical help was extended to the agricultural and industrial sectors, and it was the Russians who financed and built the Euphrates Dam. On the political level the seventies witnessed constant communications and close cooperation between the two corresponding leaderships and between the Syrian Baath Party and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. On the cultural level, too, the Soviet Union increased its influence considerably. As Table 3.2 shows, the percentage of Syrian higher education students studying in the Soviet Union increased from 11.8 to 33.6 per cent between 1965 and 1975, whereas for the United States, the percentage dropped from 10 to zero during the same period.

The position of the United States in the wake of the October

TABLE 3.2 Syrian higher education students holding government scholarships

	1965	1970	1975
Soviet Union	175	591	514
United States	149	34	—
United Kingdom	79	46	41
France	57	105	108
Total	1,477	1,901	1,529

SOURCE

Syrian Arab Republic, *Statistical Abstract, 1976* (Damascus: Central Bureau of Statistics) pp. 80–1.

1973 war, however, was not all that bleak. Indeed, the efforts at mediation by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and President Asad's initiation of an economic liberalisation programme considerably decreased the ideological and political hostility that had hitherto existed between the two countries in the pre-1973 period. By 1975, the improved Syrian–United States relations had facilitated not only increased trade between the two countries, but also the introduction of American financial and industrial aid.

The Regional Environment

This represents an 'intermediate level of interaction between the global system and the relations between any two states'.⁶ The regional system forms the immediate area of activity of the local states. A major feature of the Middle East regional system during our period of study was the existence of high-level conflict which permeated the system at all levels, and which varied from the verbal (propaganda) to the physical (wars and military interventions). Another systemic force operating at the regional level was the intensely ideological nature of intra-regional activity. This pervasiveness of strong nationalist ideology, if anything, reinforced the conflictual nature of the regional system. The Lebanese civil war, Syria's military intervention in Lebanon, and the turbulent relations existing between Syria and other Middle Eastern states were all manifestations of the system's conflictual and ideological characteristics. With regard to the

Lebanese conflict, a number of regional actors affected Syrian policy either by giving Syria active support or by issuing her with explicit warnings, or by engaging Syria in a parallel activity, thus diverting precious Syrian resources from the Lebanese issue-area.

Until Syria's military intervention in Lebanon, the Palestinians had tended to regard the Syrians as their foremost mentors in the Arab world. Syria had consistently and faithfully espoused the Palestinian cause, and had been the most militant Arab state in the Arab-Israeli issue-area. Indeed, during the 1970 Jordanian civil war it was Syria alone among the other Arab countries, many of them professed 'radicals', who came to the Palestinians' aid. This fraternity could be explained by Syria's espousal of the cause of Arab nationalism which emphasises the indivisibility of the Arab homeland, thus making the Syrians more sensitive to the plight of the Palestinians than say the more insular Egyptians. Reinforcing this intellectual concern is Palestine's geographic proximity to Syria, and its perceived legacy as once forming a part of 'Greater Syria'. Palestinians, therefore, have tended to feel a stronger bond with the Syrians than with other more distant Arabs. Thus, until the gradual deterioration of relations in 1976, Syrian support for the Palestinian cause was hardly questioned by anyone, let alone by the Palestinians themselves.

Closely connected with the Palestinian issue is the problem of Israel and its undoubted effect on Syrian policy in Lebanon. During our period of study, Israel constituted the perceived enemy of the Arab states. This was the one issue upon which all Arabs united, and this antipathy was particularly potent in Syria, not only because of Syria's strong attachment to the concept of Arab nationalism, but also because the Syrian Golan Heights had since 1967 been occupied by Israel. Indeed, Israel's increasing intransigence over the occupied territories heightened Arab perceptions of Israel as an expansionist state. As President Asad, with obvious annoyance, declared in late 1974: 'They say that we are the aggressors. This is madness. We have been defending our land against Zionist aggression for fifty, sixty years. So, each time we fail. And the Zionists end up with more land.'⁷ During the years immediately preceding the Lebanese civil war, therefore, Syrian-Israeli relations were characterised by extreme hostility leading to a number of minor clashes and skirmishes and one major war.

Similarly, apart from a very short period of normalcy during

and immediately after the October 1973 war, Iraqi–Syrian relations were during the early seventies bitterly antagonistic. Virulent accusations and recriminations were continuously levelled at one another by the two Baathist regimes. The Syrians considered the Iraqis a ‘fascist right-wing clique’, while to the Iraqis the Syrians were ‘deviationists and capitulationists’. Thus, in the same month that the Lebanese civil war began, the Damascus regime made wholesale arrests of so-called ‘pro-Iraqi, rightists’ including some seventy-five officers,⁸ while the Iraqi rulers reportedly executed thirty-five persons described as ‘pro-Syrian leftists’.⁹ The Lebanese issue, therefore, merely crystallised and intensified the already existing enmity.

In contrast to its turbulent interaction with Iraq, Syria’s relations with Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia had substantially improved in the wake of the 1973 October war. As the two intimate allies who successfully launched the war against Israel, the Egyptian and Syrian leaders continued to maintain close relations and cooperation throughout 1974. President Sadat was given a tumultuous welcome when he paid an official visit to Syria in January 1974, and later that year at the Rabat summit conference, Asad and Sadat, together with King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, were the prime manipulators behind the conference’s major resolution, which recognised the PLO as the ‘sole, legitimate, representative of the Palestinian people over any liberated Palestinian territory’.¹⁰ On their part, the Saudis, along with other Gulf states, promised to subsidise the economies of the Arab confrontation states until a resolution of the Arab–Israeli conflict was attained. Syria’s share of this subsidy was \$700 million, a donation that emphasised Saudi Arabia’s increasing involvement in the Arab–Israeli conflict, as well as the obvious improvement in relations between ‘socialist’ Syria and the ‘conservative’ kingdom. Similarly, after the low ebb of September 1970, President Asad endeavoured to improve his relations with King Hussein of Jordan in order to create a viable eastern front against the Israelis. Asad’s overtures found immediate response from the king, who at that time was trying to minimise the isolation of his country in the Arab world. Thus, throughout 1974 and later in 1975, political, economic and military contacts grew between the two countries, and high-level ministerial delegations exchanged frequent visits in order to bring the foreign policies of the two countries together. Indeed, by the beginning of 1975 the

two countries, which had fought each other five years earlier, had become the closest of allies.

The Military Capability

This can be defined as 'the ability to wage war or to deter other states from attacking. Crucial tangible indices are geography, the general level of technology, military manpower, financial resources available for defence, and weaponry. To these must be added such intangibles as leadership, training and morale.'¹¹ Although this study is primarily concerned with Syria's behaviour towards the Lebanese civil war, it is obvious that an analysis of Syria's military capability should not be confined to the Lebanese issue-area, but ought to take into consideration the comparative capabilities of the other regional actors. While neither the Lebanese Army nor the Palestinian guerrillas constituted a real constraint on Syria's military power, it was the possible military responses of other actors, especially Israel and to a lesser extent Iraq, that was the major concern of the Syrian decision-makers during the crisis period between January and October 1976.

Syria's geographic situation has constituted a major determinant of the country's behaviour towards Lebanon. In the first place, its boundaries with Lebanon were artificially drawn by France which acted as the mandatory power in the inter-war period. Before the First World War the term 'Syria' tended to denote loosely the territory now forming the contemporary states of Syria, Lebanon, Israel and Jordan.¹² Indeed, W. B. Fisher maintains that 'to the Ottomans, as to the Romans, Syria stretched from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean, and from the Sinai to the hills of Southern Turkey, with Palestine as a smaller province of this wider unit'.¹³ Thus, the perceived historical indivisibility of Syria and Lebanon has consistently been a major component of the psychological environment of most Syrian decision-makers, including the present leadership. President Asad has unequivocally declared that 'throughout history, Syria and Lebanon have been one country and one people'.¹⁴ Nor should this be considered an exaggerated Syrian perception, for it is interesting to note, for example, that what is

now called the American University of Beirut was established in 1866 as the Syrian Protestant College.

Syria's geographic concern with Lebanon also has a strategic root. In their perennial conflict with Israel, the Syrian decision-makers have tended to consider the mountains of Southern Lebanon as natural defensive frontiers that could be utilised to stop, or at least crucially delay, an Israeli military thrust should a war suddenly occur. Syria's security would thus be jeopardised if Israel were to annex the South of Lebanon. It was in this context that President Asad made his often-quoted statement relating to the interdependence of Syrian and Lebanese security.¹⁵ Moreover, an activation of the Lebanese front would force Syria to spread its forces more thinly on the ground in order to confront a possible Israeli flanking move through Arkoub and the foothills of Mount Hermon.¹⁶ In addition to obvious historical roots, therefore, the geographic factor comprised an important strategic dimension which had considerable influence on the formulation and implementation of Syria's policies towards Lebanon, particularly as these related to questions of defence and military activity.

A good, yet by no means comprehensive, indicator of a country's preoccupation with defence and of its ranking in terms of military power in relation to other regional states can be discerned from analysing the country's defence expenditure.¹⁷ Apart from facilitating objective comparisons with other states, a study of the defence expenditure of a particular state provides interesting insights not only into a state's environmental situation but also into crucial elite images and attitudes. A concern with security, prestige and/or rank would be generally reflected in the expenditure on defence. Similarly, the perceptions of other states are also affected by the objectively observable elements of a state's military strength.

Table 3.3 indicates that of the states involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and who, by implication therefore, were relevant to the Lebanese situation, Syria's proportional expenditure on defence was less than that of Egypt and Israel, but more than that of Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon. This can probably explain, if not fully then at least partially, the respect the Syrian decision-makers had for the military capability of Egypt and Israel. There can be no doubt that Syria's vigorous condemnation of Egypt's seeming moderate posture towards Israel in 1975 resulted from the fear of

TABLE 3.3 Defence expenditure of selected Middle Eastern States, 1976 (billion dollars)

	Gross National Product	Defence expenditure	Defence as percentage of GNP
Syria	4.70 ^a	1.00	21.3
Lebanon	3.70 ^b	0.12	3.2
Israel	12.60	4.21	33.4
Jordan	1.30	0.16	12.3
Iraq	14.20	1.20	8.5
Egypt	12.90	4.86	37.7

NOTES

^a figure in GDP for 1975^b figure for 1974

SOURCE

IISS, *The Military Balance, 1977-1978*, pp. 31-40.

a possible Egyptian withdrawal from the Arab-Israeli conflict.¹⁸ Similarly, it was because of the Syrian respect for Israel's military might that contacts with Israel through the United States were assiduously pursued by the Syrian decision-makers prior to their intervention in Lebanon in June 1976.¹⁹ Conversely, Syrian attitudes towards the Iraqis and the Lebanese forces clearly exhibited the Syrian confidence in their military capability. Iraqi military moves on the Syrian-Iraqi border immediately after Syria's intervention in Lebanon did not seem to worry the Damascus authorities unduly.²⁰ Nor did the Syrian leaders ever entertain the idea of suffering a defeat at the hands of their adversaries in Lebanon. President Asad thus reminded the Palestinian/Moslem forces in July 1976 during the military stalemate that followed Syria's intervention: 'There is no military problem in Lebanon. If we intended to settle our accounts by military means, it would be an easy matter. If we wanted to settle accounts militarily, then the matter could have been settled long ago, but we did not follow that course.'²¹ Indeed, when the Syrians finally decided to follow the military course, their forces inflicted a massive and comprehensive defeat on the Leftist alliance in less than forty-eight hours.

A major component of a state's military capability is the availability and utility of human resources. A large population

can be a distinct source of strength since it can be used as a reservoir for military might. While Syria's population of 7.6 million in 1976 is considered to be small in global terms, regionally it can be classified as average, since the mean for the twenty-one²² sovereign Middle Eastern states is 10.3 million.²³ This enabled Syria to produce an armed force totalling 227,000 men in 1976. This compares favourably with the figures for Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Israel whose armed forces for the same year numbered 18,250, 67,900, 158,000 and 158,500 respectively.²⁴

The size of a population 'is not an absolute index of superiority in military manpower. Other criteria are important: education and skills, that is, the level of modernisation, and such intangible qualities as initiative, adaptability, and morale.'²⁵ In Syria, as in almost all other Arab states, the educational level of the population is very low when compared with the countries of the developed world. As late as 1975, 57 per cent of the Syrian population was illiterate,²⁶ and despite the efforts of the Asad regime no dramatic improvement was achieved. Nevertheless, the Syrian Government has concentrated much of its energy and resources during the first half of this decade on the rapid development of education. The major emphasis has been on the rural areas, where many new primary schools, and to a lesser extent secondary schools, have been recently opened. This is clearly illustrated by Table 3.4, which shows an 82 per cent increase in the number of primary students between 1965 and 1975.

Although lacking in education, the Syrian soldier has exhibited considerable bravery in Syria's military encounters, es-

TABLE 3.4 The expansion of education in Syria 1965-1975

	1965	1975
Primary school students	665,545	1,211,570
Secondary school students	122,748	314,272
Higher education students	40,079	67,069
Total number of students	828,372	1,592,911

SOURCE

Syrian Arab Republic, *Statistical Abstract, 1976* (Damascus: Central Bureau of Statistics) pp. 616-48.

pecially in the October 1973 war and in the struggle for the control of Mount Hermon in the spring of 1974. Similarly, the Officer Corps exhibited a much higher level of commitment in the two above encounters than that usually associated with Arab army officers. Perhaps the perception held by most Syrians that their country is 'the throbbing heart of Arab nationalism'²⁷ is responsible for the relatively high morale in the Syrian armed forces. This has been considerably reinforced by the stability of the Asad regime, and the consequent and gradual professionalisation of the Army.

The Economic Capability

Syria's economy has always been agriculturally based.²⁸ Agriculture accounts for approximately one-fifth to one-sixth of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employs almost half of the labour force (see Table 3.5). Syria's main agricultural output is produced in the plain which extends from the Jordanian border north-eastwards to the Euphrates valley. It is in this area that Syria's main cities, Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo are to be found. Recently, with the development of the Euphrates Dam, the land between the Euphrates in Syria and the Tigris in Iraq

TABLE 3.5 The structure of Syria's GDP by sectors, 1971-5 (constant prices of 1963)

	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975
Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	19.2	22.5	15.9	18.6	15.7
Mining and manufacturing	19.5	19.5	20.3	21.7	18.1
Building and construction	3.3	3.0	2.9	2.9	3.3
Transport and communications	12.9	9.6	13.7	10.6	10.8
Wholesale and retail trade	16.8	16.9	15.9	16.0	18.5
Finance and insurance	2.1	2.3	2.3	2.3	2.8
Ownership of dwellings	5.8	5.5	5.5	4.8	4.0
Government	13.2	13.5	16.0	16.0	20.1
Services	7.2	7.2	7.5	7.1	6.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

SOURCE

Syrian Arab Republic, *Statistical Abstract*, 1976, p. 913.

called al-Jezira, which since the early fifties had been a major cotton producer, has become Syria's other major agricultural area.

The development of the Euphrates Dam and other extensive irrigation programmes were meant not only to increase agricultural production but also to steady it. 'One of the chief characteristics of Syria's agricultural performance, in the absence of any established large-scale irrigation system, is the violent annual fluctuation in output resulting from wide variations in rainfall. . . . Agriculture's share in the GDP has fallen substantially since the early 1960's.'²⁹ It was because of this problem that 28 per cent of public investment in the Third Five-Year Plan (1971-5) was allocated to the Euphrates Dam and other irrigation and land improvements (see Table 3.6). The Fourth Five-Year Plan (1976-80) is primarily concerned with utilising the Dam's stored water to irrigate an additional 240,000 hectares of land by 1980, with the final goal of 640,000 hectares to be achieved in later years.³⁰

TABLE 3.6 Third Five-Year Plan (1971-5)

	<i>Investment (Public Sector) (\$ million)</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Euphrates Dam Project	434.1	24.7
Irrigation and land improvement	57.7	3.3
Agriculture	118.8	6.8
Industry	319.6	18.2
Power and fuel	276.2	15.7
Transport and communications	213.4	12.1
Towns and buildings	159.6	9.1
Public services	143.3	8.2
Local trade	34.0	1.9
Total	1,756.7	100.0

SOURCE

The Middle East and North Africa, 1976-1977 (London: Europa Publications, 1976) p. 670.

The decline in agriculture's share of GDP could also be attributed, perhaps more crucially, to the growing importance of the mining and manufacturing sector. Thus, until 1974, cotton

had constituted Syria's major export commodity. However, in that year earnings from oil exports surpassed those of cotton (see Tables 3.7 and 3.8). At present only five oil-fields are being explored, which represent approximately 500 square kilometres of a total area of 75,000 square kilometres of land offering good

TABLE 3.7 Oil production and earnings, 1971-6

Year	Production (^{'000} barrels/day)	Export	Value of exports (\$ million) ^a	% of exports
1971	105,780	69,600	46.1	22.3
1972	117,240	77,100	52.4	17.6
1973	110,420	82,700	76.7	21.7
1974	130,700	117,300	434.5	55.2
1975	192,740	189,400	642.3	69.1
1976	195,200	183,300	698.8	61.4

NOTE

^a The value in the original table was given in £Syrian. In 1971-2, the selling exchange rate was \$1 = £S3.82; in 1973, the selling rate was \$1 = £S3.80; in 1974-6, the selling rate was \$ = £S3.70.

SOURCE

Financial Times, 16 November 1977.

TABLE 3.8 Export of commodities, 1972-5 (million dollars)

Exports	1972	1973	1974	1975
Cotton	109.6	129.6	205.6	135.8
Other textile goods	30.8	52.8	52.5	45.8
Cereals	24.8	12.4	0.1	0.0
Vegetables and fruit	13.4	9.2	10.0	11.1
Precious metals	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1
Preserved foods,				
beverages and tobacco	16.6	18.4	25.5	28.8
Live animals	15.7	13.2	3.3	3.5
Dairy products	0.6	0.3	0.3	0.4
Crude petroleum	52.4	76.7	434.5	642.3
Other products	23.4	37.4	55.8	62.1

SOURCE

The Middle East and North Africa, 1976-1977, p. 671; *Financial Times*, 16 November 1977.

prospects for oil exploration. Indeed, a report by the Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) in 1976 put Syria's oil reserves at a healthy 11,900 million barrels.³² Given this new input in the economy and the boom which followed the October 1973 war, Syria's economy experienced striking growth in the first half of the decade. National Income increased from \$1,560 million in 1970 to \$2,860 million in 1974. During the same period, the rate of capital growth increased by 300 per cent and the State Budget grew from \$887.4 million in 1973 to \$1,684.9 million in 1974 to \$2,715.8 million in 1975.³³

The improvement in Syria's economic performance in the years 1970–5 was reflected in the dramatic and substantial increase in Syria's exports which in 1975 reached the impressive figure of \$930 million, and a commodity breakdown of exports shows oil revenue accounting for 69 per cent of export earnings in that year. However, the same period also witnessed steep rises in imports, totalling in 1975 \$1,685 million which left Syria's external trade at a deficit of \$755 million. Nevertheless, in 1975 Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states extended to Syria aid amounting to \$690 million,³⁴ which made good the Syrian balance of payments deficit.

Dependence on foreign aid, however, can become an effective constraint on the domestic and foreign policies of the recipient state. As has been pointed out elsewhere,³⁵ foreign aid constitutes a double-edged limitation. On the one hand it is always a variable to be considered by the recipient decision-makers when formulating their foreign policies, and on the other hand it is a possible weapon for the donor state if it wishes to affect a specific reorientation in the domestic or foreign policy of the recipient country. In this case, for example, it is interesting to note that Syria felt compelled to attend the Sixth Islamic Conference in July 1975 held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, even though Syria had consistently tried to minimise the religious element and had endeavoured to follow secular lines in her foreign and domestic policies.

The Political Structure

No other Arab country could match the turbulent post-independence history that Syria has experienced since it gained its

independence from France in April 1946. Indeed, the coup of November 1970, popularly known as the 'Corrective Movement', which installed in power the regime of President Asad constituted the twenty-first change of government in the twenty-four years of the country's independence. This persistent political turmoil makes the stability of the Asad regime in the six years spanning his ascendancy to power and the conclusion of the Lebanon civil war all the more remarkable. In 1975, an Israeli authority on Syria and Arab affairs, Professor Moshe Ma'oz, said of the Syrian order:

Syria has undergone impressive changes since it became independent. In 1946, there was a political frame without a political community—a non-state. But now it is becoming one of the most stable regimes in the Arab world. The change has been particularly marked under Asad. He has created a fairly popular Presidential regime: radical left, the most advanced social regime in the Arab world, it is progressively widening the frame to include more peasants and labourers. Syria has made more impressive progress in the socio-economic revolution than Egypt, which wants to move in the same direction.³⁶

It is also worth noting that this stability and progress was sustained at a time when a portion of Syrian land was occupied and when a fifth of the Syrian budget was allocated to defence. The political system which evolved during those years was dominated by three decision-making institutions: the Party, the Presidency and the defence establishment.

According to the Syrian Constitution which was approved by the People's Assembly in 1973, 'the Baath Arab Socialist Party is the leader-party in the state. It leads a Progressive National Front whose duty is to mobilise the potentials of the masses and place them in the service of the Arab Nation's objectives'.³⁷ The Baath Party, therefore, was the core institutional unit in the Syrian political system, and although in theory the Baath Party was supposed to share power with the other parties in the Progressive National Front in reality the Baath remained the primary institutional actor.³⁸

Baathist ideology is the brain-child of Michel Aflaq who founded the party and was its first Secretary-General. The ideology of the Baath rested on three fundamental principles: the

unity and freedom of the Arab nation within its Arab homeland; a belief in the uniqueness of the Arab nation, which is expressed in the vitality and resourcefulness of the Arab people; and a belief in the special mission of the Arab nation, aimed at the promotion of humanitarianism and the eradication of colonialism. For the Party to succeed in achieving these aims, Aflaq insisted that the Baath had to be nationalist, populist, socialist and revolutionary. The radicalism of the Baath later became more manifest as a result of the Sixth National Congress held in Damascus in October 1963. The Congress declared the peasants and workers to constitute the base not only of the 'Arab revolution' but also, and more significantly, of the Party itself. Accordingly, only peasants, workers and revolutionary intellectuals of civilian or military background could accomplish the socialist revolution. Moreover, the Congress insisted on the need for workers' control of the means of production, and for an agrarian reform where collective farms would be governed by the peasants.³⁹

From its underground beginnings the Party first assumed power in Syria in March 1963. The coups that followed changed the leadership but did not undermine the authority of the Party, as it was mainly Baathist officers who executed these coups. Organisationally the Party was of a pyramidal form, with the cells of the popular base that are responsible for the day-to-day contacts with the various sections of the population at the bottom. At the top of the organisational structure lay the Regional Command which formed the central decision-making authority in the country. In addition to the President, who acted as the Secretary-General of the Party, the Command included such influential members of the policy-making elite as Abd al-Rahman Khleifawi, the Prime Minister (appointed in August 1976), Mustafa Tlas, the Defence Minister, and Abd al-Halim Khaddam, the Foreign Minister. Three consequential members who did not hold ministerial portfolios were Abdulla al-Ahmar, the Assistant Secretary-General of the Party, Muhammed Jaber Bajbouj, the Assistant Secretary-General of the Regional Command, and Rifaat Asad, member of the Regional Command and the brother of the President. Parallel to this, there was the National Command whose sphere of responsibility lay in the foreign sector, particularly with all matters dealing with the Arab nation. Unlike its Iraqi counterpart, which was allocated no more than a nebulous advisory function, the Syrian National

Command wielded considerable influence in foreign affairs. It was thus significant that six out of the seventeen members of the Command were also members of the Regional Command, including the President, Khaddam, Ahmar, and Bajbouj. Particularly active was the National Command's International Relations Committee under the chairmanship of the Jordanian-born Dr Fawaz al-Sayyagh. Moreover, in the issue-area of Arab-Israeli relations and during the Lebanese civil war, the two Palestinian members of the Command, Samir al-Attari and Zuhair Mohsen, the leader of al-Saiqa guerrilla group, were active participants in the decision-making process.

After the ascension of the Asad regime to power in 1970, the Baath began to gradually allow other political groups a measure of participation in power. The first such concession occurred in Syria in February 1971 when a People's Council was formed with eighty-seven of its seats going to the Baathists, forty to Nasserists and eight to Communists. In March 1972, the Syrians formed the Progressive National Front, whose central leadership consisted of seventeen members only nine of whom were Baathists. A year later, parliamentary elections, the first in ten years, were held in Syria, and the Baath Party and its allies, the Communist Party, the Arab Socialist Union, the Arab Socialists and the Socialist Unionists, who had run on a unified 'National Progressive' ticket, won by a two-thirds majority.⁴⁰ Significantly, the Minister of the Interior said that the elections 'will move Syria to a new phase of stability'.⁴¹

It must be noted, however, that these liberalisation efforts were by no means meant to decentralise the authority or to undermine the pervasive power and authority of the Baath. As has already been discussed, the Baath Party remained the effective ruling party in Syria. Indeed, it vigorously endeavoured to extend its doctrine throughout the various sections of Syrian society in an effort to make itself a truly mass-based party. Because of the agricultural character of Syria's social system, the major mobilisational drive was concentrated on the villages and the peasantry, and as early as 1974 this seemed to be succeeding in breaking down traditional ties and loyalties. According to a study of Baathist performance in the villages in 1974,

The Baathist ideology with its blend of egalitarianism and nationalism seems a well-pitched appeal to Syrian peasants.

The invocation of nationalist symbols against a background of Syrian activism in the Arab nationalist cause and outside threats and blows against Syria, appears to tap a deep-rooted peasant nationalism. Many peasants are attracted by components of social reform in the ideology which coincide with their own interests. Many younger peasants, less oriented than their elders to tradition, seem to be very receptive to the prospects of modernisation evoked by the Ba'th Party.⁴²

While there is no doubt that the Baath Party had by 1975 developed into the major political organ in Syria, its power and authority was constrained by a number of factors. The secular character of the Baath placed it in direct conflict with Islam, the predominant religion in Syria and the rest of the Arab world. Islam, unlike Christianity, is a social, political, legal and cultural system. In the Sharia the Moslems have a law that deals with all constitutional and legal matters and as such is treated, in orthodox Islamic theory, as the only legally acceptable code. Consequently, to the devout Moslem, there can be only one legitimate rule and that is through Islam. Baathist ideology, on the other hand, is a secular doctrine. Aflaq, himself a Christian, acknowledges the debt of Arab nationalism to Islam, but stresses only those aspects of Islam that are moral and spiritual in nature. He pointedly disregards its political and constitutional implications and significantly insists on its complete subordination to Arab nationalism. This dichotomy between religion and secularism has frequently come to the surface in Syria, as the conservative Sunni majority especially of Homs and Hama repeatedly registered its disapproval of Baathist secularism and the perceived 'Alawi' (a minority heretical sect which claimed Asad as an adherent) domination of governmental institutions.

Another constraint on the Party's power related to the gradual ascendancy and predominance of President Asad in the decision-making process. After his coup in 1970 Asad's popularity and stature in Syria and the rest of the Arab world continued to grow, reaching a pinnacle during and after the October 1973 war. One American analyst who visited Syria in 1974 observed that while the adulation for Asad in Syria was much calmer than the Egyptian worship he had seen for Nasser in the 1950s, it nevertheless 'seemed more genuine, rooted deeper in mind than emotion. Asad was certainly far from being an oratorical

wizard . . . his style was low-key and determined, and it had obviously, from all the laudatory talk [the author had] heard from a broad cross section of Syrians, struck a responsive chord in the Syrian character.'⁴³ One specific feature of Asad's character that seemed particularly to appeal to the Syrian mass public was the considerable personal dignity and pride that the President displayed in his dealings with other world leaders. One later yet typical instance is a case in point. Unlike President Sadat of Egypt, King Hussein of Jordan and Prince Fahd of Saudi Arabia, who all responded positively to an American request by going to Washington in spring-summer 1977 to meet the newly installed President Carter, Asad insisted on meeting Carter outside the United States. While he accepted the need for dialogue with the Americans the Syrian President was not prepared 'to crawl to Washington as others were doing'.⁴⁴ This mass-based popularity certainly lifted Asad to a position above the rest of the Party's hierarchy to the extent that the Presidency's position in Syria's decision-making became more central than that of the Regional Command of the Party.

The President's position *vis-à-vis* the Party was further enhanced by his membership of, and close contacts with, the defence establishment. As the former, extremely popular Minister of Defence and Chief of the Air Force, the President's power base was firmly rooted in the armed forces, and this coercive capability constituted an important psychological and operational variable in the structure of power relations existing between the Party and the Presidency. Indeed, the circumstances in which the President assumed power in November 1970, which will be discussed later, no doubt continued to serve as a stark reminder to the party hierarchy of the military's potential coercive role in any power struggle between the Party and the Presidency.

The President's power and authority was also legally endorsed by the revised Syrian Constitution of 1973. This provided for a very strong Executive with sweeping powers to appoint ministers, members of the supreme court, and members of the Higher Judicial Council. While the directly elected People's Assembly (Parliament) served as the national legislature, the President was given important legislative functions between sessions of the People's Assembly and 'in cases of absolute need'. The President could also 'submit important matters concerning higher national interests' to a popular referendum,⁴⁵ thus circumventing the

People's Assembly and the Party. Crucially, the Constitution also stipulated that the President must also assume the duties of the Secretary-General of the Party.

Asad's eventual ascendancy in Syria's decision-making process could also be attributed to the susceptibility of the Arab populations to the phenomenon of personalised leadership. Like all relatively newly independent and developing societies the Arab world lacks established organisational and bureaucratic structures, thus making it easier for the Chief Executive to increase his prestige and influence. Moreover, their social and cultural backgrounds incline the Arab populations to be particularly amenable to the idea of a single, clearly identifiable source of authority. Socially, the extended family, the tribe and the village had for centuries formed the main units of Arab society, and in all three cases authority had been traditionally bestowed upon one person. Culturally, Islam prescribes the concentration of religious and political power in the hands of one man, al-Khalifa, i.e. the successor of the Prophet Muhammed. While al-Khalifa, as an institution, has been politically extinct since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the idea of an identifiable and personalised authority still forms an important part of the cultural values and principles of Arab Moslem societies.

Asad's authority in Syria, therefore, stemmed from societal factors as well as from his personal deeds and endeavours. The growing stature and influence of Asad naturally had a considerable impact on the attitudes of the other members of the Party Commands, who came to accept him as a leader rather than a mere colleague. Thus, for example, the official statement of the Party's Regional Command on the work of the Sixth Regional Congress held in April 1975 was full of praise for, and appreciation of, Asad's achievements. The following excerpts clearly show the centrality of the President:

In domestic policy, the Congress reviewed the positive results of the Party's policy and of the Revolution following the emergence of the corrective movement under the leadership of Comrade Hafiz al-Asad and declared its adherence to this movement. . . . As regards Arab and international policy, the Congress . . . confirmed the soundness of the policy followed by our party and region (country) under the leadership of Comrade Hafiz al-Asad . . . The Congress placed on record

Comrade Hafiz al-Asad's responsible and courageous attitude to the Palestine question . . . and it greeted the masses of our people, rallying round our party and the leader of their march, Comrade Hafiz al-Asad.⁴⁶

Similar eulogistic statements came also from the National Command of the Party, from the Cabinet and from the Progressive National Front.⁴⁷ As a result, President Asad, was able to act unilaterally without prior consultation with the Party's Commands. In certain instances, he took decisions that were blatantly contradictory to the Party's demands. Thus, for example, although key cabinet ministers were criticised by members of the National Command, these retained their posts in the cabinet reshuffle of September 1974.⁴⁸ Similarly although Prime Minister Mahmoud Ayyoubi and General Naji Jamil, the Deputy Premier and the Chief of the Air Force, were not re-elected to the 21-man Regional Command in April 1975, both retained their posts.⁴⁹ This was seen as a gesture of defiance by Asad, particularly as Ayyoubi had, himself, offered to resign.⁵⁰

It must be stressed, however, that Asad's centrality should not suggest that the Party served a purely mobilisational function for the regime. Unlike, for instance, the Egyptian Arab Socialist Union (ASU) during the Presidencies of Nasser and Sadat, whose primary role was to mobilise 'sentiment for the regime and . . . [to render] the masses unattainable to alternative leaders',⁵¹ and which was completely subordinate to the Presidency, the Baath Party in Syria vigorously participated in policy-making. The two Commands of the Party were consistently consulted by the President, and if their wishes in some cases were not met, in other instances the President did accede to the Party's requests and demands. For example, as a result of constant criticisms from the Party, the Minister for Economic Affairs, Muhammed Haider, was replaced in August 1976 by Jamil Shia.⁵² Moreover, the decision to intervene militarily in Lebanon was taken only after it was approved by the two Commands of the Party during a week of long and stormy meetings.⁵³ In the latter case Asad needed all his skill to get the Party behind him.

During our period of study, therefore, Syria had a presidential system with a powerful institutional sub-system in the form of the Baath Party that tended to constrain the President's freedom of manoeuvrability. Much of this constraint arose from Asad's own

perception of his role *vis-à-vis* the Party. Asad became a member of the Baath Party at an early age, long before he entered the military. Ideologically and emotionally, therefore, he himself accorded considerable respect and prestige to the Party.⁵⁴ Moreover, much of his regime's legitimacy rested on the system of values advocated by the Baath, and any undermining of the power and prestige of the Party would have led to the weakening of the regime itself. Consequently, the two institutions of the Presidency and the Party in Syria were dependent on each other for ideological credibility and political survival—an interdependence which was very rare among Arab political systems where institutions were generally completely dependent upon, and subservient to, the power and authority of the Chief Executive.

Another institution that participated directly in the decision-making process was the defence establishment. In pluralist systems boasting a developed political culture the military act as an 'institutional interest group',⁵⁵ but in Arab societies the armed forces tended to constitute a major component of the high policy-making elite. In Syria, the representatives of the armed forces were regularly consulted by the President, especially with regard to foreign policy issues, and during the Lebanese civil war key members of the military hierarchy such as the Chief of Staff of the armed forces and the Chief of the Air Force established themselves as perennial and necessary members of Asad's inner decision-making group. Finally, as with his ideological affiliation to the Baath Party, Asad's professional association with the armed forces, as the former Air Force Commander and Minister of Defence, made him particularly sensitive to the military's wishes and demands.

Apart from the President's own susceptibilities, however, there were more fundamental reasons for the important role of the military not only in Syria's domestic politics but also in Arab societies generally. The armed forces, particularly in the post-independence period, were accorded immense respect and prestige by the Arab populations. In the case of Syria, after years of struggle against colonialist rule, it was hardly surprising that the Army came to be perceived as the guardian and protector of the country's newly acquired sovereign status—a status for which the Syrians had bitterly fought. In a sense, the Army, after 1945, became the symbol of a newly discovered and jealously guarded national integrity. Besides, respect for the military has always

constituted an important component of the cultural heritage of the Islamic Middle Eastern societies. After all, it was the soldiers and their legendary commanders who expanded the realm of Islam and spread the message of the Prophet across three continents. The position of the military in Syria was further reinforced by the Baath Party's early concentration on recruitment from its ranks. This policy began to produce results as early as 1954, when two of the leading officers in the coup against General Adib Shishakli were professed members of the Baath Party, and indeed after 1963 it was the Baathist army officers who kept the Baath Party in power. This inability of the Party to assume power except by means of a military coup automatically bestowed upon the military a position of centrality which it was naturally loath to relinquish. However, during the 1960s and 1970s, the civilian faction of the Party became increasingly wary of the military's gradual ascendancy in party and national affairs, and conscious of the dangers of over-reliance on them. In 1966, Michel Aflaq insisted that army officers must be prevented from 'forming a bloc inside the leadership of the Party. If the Party selects a military member for its leadership, he should not maintain his military position, but should become a popular leader. There is no real revolutionary party in the world whose leaders are military men continuing to command army units.'⁵⁶

The propensity of the military to intervene in party and national politics could best be illustrated by a reference to the schism which existed during 1969–70 in the Syrian ruling Baath Party. Throughout these two years a covert struggle persisted between the civilian faction led by the Party's Secretary-General, Salah Jadid (himself an ex-officer) and the military wing under Asad, the then Defence Minister, who accused the civilians of communist tendencies and of deviating from Baathist principles. The conflict reached a climax in October 1970 with the resignation of Dr Nur al-Din Attasi, the Marxist-oriented civilian President and Prime Minister, under pressure from the military. An internal crisis ensued which led to the convocation of an emergency Party Congress in an effort to resolve the deadlock between the two conflicting factions. In the Congress, Asad and his deputy, Mustafa Tlas, were completely isolated. A number of serious charges were levelled at them which included the alleged attempt to create a 'duality of power' by violating party discipline, preventing the implementation of party decisions and

directives, arbitrarily arresting party members and censoring party mail. Thus, Congress resolved to remove Asad and Tlas from their party, government and army posts. However, the Congress did not have the constitutional authority to take such a decision. This prerogative belonged to the Regional Command.⁵⁷ Asad immediately ordered army units to occupy the offices of the Party and proceeded to arrest its top civilian leaders, including the Secretary-General, the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, and the Minister of the Interior.⁵⁸ He ousted all the sixteen members of the Regional Command and installed himself as Premier and Secretary-General of the Party with a new fourteen-member Command.

It is perhaps this conspiratorial experience of President Asad and his predecessors which accounted for the privileged position of army officers in contemporary Syrian society. According to an authoritative account, the officers

receive higher salaries than individuals of comparable civilian status. [They] get free medical care and generous travelling allowances. Army co-operatives provide them with every conceivable article at cost price as well as duty-free foreign imports not available to the rest of the population. Interest-free loans enable them to buy houses and villas. . . . Careers involving social prestige and good salaries are opened to officers on a wide scale. Since 1963, many officers and ex-officers have been attached to government ministries and departments and to state economic enterprises.⁵⁹

Generally, the military's primary concern is with its prestige and well-being. Presumably, Syria's high defence expenditure in the period under study (over a fifth of the country's GNP) related in no small measure to the active lobby of the armed forces' leadership, as well as to Asad's own efforts to ensure the military's loyalty. It has also been argued that in the issue-area of Arab-Israeli relations, the Syrian military personnel have tended to perceive any concessions on that front as an effort to humiliate the armed forces, to undermine its prestige, and to ridicule its national duty. The defence establishment has consequently been persistently hawkish, favouring greater military action with Israel. Thus, months after the end of the October 1973 war, Asad found it necessary to continue active military hostilities on the

Mount Hermon front.⁶⁰ Similarly, as a result of the prolonged impasse which followed Syria's military intervention in Lebanon on 1 June 1976 reports of widespread discontent within army ranks became rampant. It was thus hardly coincidental that on 1 August 1976, after two months of a morale-draining military stalemate in Lebanon, Asad asked General Abd al-Rahman Khleifawi, a popular military commander to form a cabinet. Khleifawi was known to have enjoyed great respect in the rank and file of the armed forces, and his appointment was obviously aimed at strengthening the Army's confidence in Asad's regime and policies.⁶¹

The military's influence in the decision-making process, particularly *vis-à-vis* the Presidency must not, however, be exaggerated. Asad's sensitivity to the wishes of the military should not be construed as a presidential subservience to the armed forces. Unlike the situation in Turkey, for example, the Syrian President remained the final arbiter of power. Thus, no reaction whatsoever was forthcoming from the Army to Asad's major reshuffle of the Syrian Military High Command in August 1974. This was particularly indicative of the President's control as it included the forcible retirement of the Syrian Chief of Staff during the October 1973 war, General Yousif Shakur.

The military's primary weakness in the power relationship with the Presidency related to Asad's domestic popularity and prestige, and his growing international stature. Moreover, Asad was careful to take personal measures to ensure the compliance of the military if and when the need arose, by building up a pervasive intelligence network in the armed forces and creating the impressively equipped and meticulously trained 'Defence Companies', commanded by his brother Rifaat, to act as a presidential guard.

Interest Groups

In the literature of Western political science interest groups have been conceptualised as performing two major functions in the political system—that of communicating information to the decision-making elite and of advocating specific policy options to the high-level authorities. Four types of interest advocacy have been posited: institutional, associational, non-associational, and

anomic.⁶² Institutional interest groups are supposed to comprise military establishments and bureaucratic organisations. In the case of Syria, however, while bureaucratic organisations have exerted little influence on the decision-making elite, the military establishment, as has been indicated, is so central and pervasive in the making of decisions that it cannot be conceptualised as an interest group. Therefore, only the last three advocacy types are relevant to the Syrian case.

Associational interest groups are those 'which exist specifically to advocate interests—trade unions, business organisations, peasant associations, ethnic and civil groups, etc. In some foreign policy systems these groups do not perform either a communication or advocacy function; in others they range from relevant to crucial.'⁶³ In Syria, probably the most influential of these associational interest groups have been the landowners and feudal chieftains. As an agriculturally based society, Syria had been traditionally dominated both politically and economically by a number of feudal families and clans. Many of these families also tended to have wide-ranging interests in the business and merchant activities of the urban centres such as Damascus and Aleppo. The power of this group was clearly exhibited in 1961, as it was the landowners and merchants who motivated and financed the coup which broke up the Nasserite United Arab Republic. Thus, although the agrarian reform was instituted as early as 1958, by 1975 2.3 per cent of the cultivated land belonged to state farms, 31 per cent to farmers cooperatives, and the remaining 66.7 per cent was still privately owned.⁶⁴ Indeed the prevailing tendency of the Asad regime during the period of study was to develop and stimulate capitalist relations in the countryside, and in fact some land which had been seized earlier was returned to its former owners.⁶⁵ Unlike their predecessors, therefore, President Asad and the present Baathist leadership seem to have fully appreciated the power of this group and consequently tended to tread carefully on ground that had previously proved perilous. There could be no doubt that the perceived need to win the support of this group formed part of the motivation behind Asad's post-1973 efforts to liberalise the economy, his quest for better understanding in Syrian-American relations, his very cordial foreign policy towards the conservative Arab states, particularly Saudi Arabia, and his relaxation of foreign trade restrictions. Thus, for example, the two decrees published in

March 1974 which allowed Syrian businessmen to introduce and take out of the country any amount of foreign currency bank-notes without restrictions, as well as permitting private importers to settle their import bills freely and without the need to render an account of the source of foreign currency to be used for this purpose,⁶⁶ were enthusiastically welcomed by merchants, land-owners and businessmen.

The mass of peasants, on the other hand, did not constitute a major constraint on the Baathist leadership. This was particularly the case since the Party was able to score some notable successes in its mobilisational drive in the countryside. According to an independent study conducted in 1974 the Party had become 'a leadership grid of more than 100,000 peasant cadres stretched throughout the country. The Peasant Union had mobilised about 40 per cent of the economically active adult (over 16) population or about 50 per cent of those eligible for membership. Since 1968, the Union claims to have been expanding at a rate of about 30,000 each year.'⁶⁷ On the political level, therefore, the peasantry could not be considered a consequential advocacy group. However, due to the persistence of traditional and conservative values, the peasants tended to be particularly vulnerable to religious symbols that were occasionally used against the Asad regime, in response to the President's commitment to secularist policies and his affiliation to the minority Alawi sect.

Similarly, by 1976, over half of the nation's industrial labour force had been organised by the Baathist-controlled General Federation of Trade Unions. Thus, while other political tendencies, such as Nasserist and communist, were tolerated, Baathist supremacy was always assured at the national level. After 1970, however, the trade union movement became more democratic with the restoration of the electoral principle at every level, and as a result of a perceptible decrease in government intervention in the Federation's business. Nevertheless, apart from specifically labour issues, the Federation, and the workers generally, exerted very little influence on the government's domestic and international activity.

Non-associational interest groups include commentators and journalists of the mass media. Under the Baath, the structure of the press was modified according to socialist patterns. Most publications are published by approved organisations such as political, religious, ethnic or professional associations, trade

unions, and a number are produced by government ministries. The two major dailies are *al-Baath*, the organ of the Party, and *al-Thawra*, the semi-official mouthpiece of the Government. Naturally, the papers were heavily scrutinised and criticisms of the regime were kept to a minimum. Nevertheless, occasionally the newspapers did mount campaigns against specific shortcomings of the regime. In August 1977, *al-Baath* denounced the public service for its failure to carry out party principles, for its negligence, incompetence and corruption. According to the paper, 'the rotten bureaucracy' had turned the public sector into 'a cow that has been milked by almost everyone except the masses'. Such corruption 'would only incite the masses against the Revolution and the Party and cast doubts on the President's ability to put an end to the sabotage'. More controversially, the paper, without resorting to the usual innuendoes and insinuations, openly declared that 'the Executive Authority, throughout the last seven years, was incapable of catching up with the level and requirements of the Revolution'. Later on, the President himself was pointedly faulted for 'having been too involved with foreign policy to pay adequate attention to domestic policy'.⁶⁸ It must be stressed, however, that such tirades were very infrequent and rarely reached this level of ferocity. Nevertheless, the fact that they could be made was in itself very revealing of the nature of the decision-making structure.

Finally anomic advocacy represent 'the more or less spontaneous penetrations by unorganised parts of society into the political system in the form of riots, demonstrations, assassinations, etc., where these are not simply the use of unconventional or violent means by organised groups.'⁶⁹ In Syria, religious and sectarian divisions and antagonisms occasionally erupted into massive riots and demonstrations aimed at the regime. These were usually spontaneous eruptions sparked by particular events such as the announcement of a secular Constitution in March 1973. However, such violent manifestations depicted a more general malaise relating to indigenous sectarian schisms that could lead to future societal dislocation, and as such must have represented a most potent constraint on the policy-making elite.

Since 1966 the most prominent members of the high-policy elite have come from the minority Alawi sect. As Table 3.9 shows, the Sunni Moslems constitute the vast majority of the Syrian population, and they tend to be suspicious of the Alawi sect,

which is 'a secret offshoot of Ismaili Shi'ism that appears to have incorporated animistic and Christian beliefs'.⁷⁰ This suspicion is reinforced by a deep-rooted Sunni resentment of the recent Alawi political ascendancy, not only because of the Alawi minority status but also due to the Sunnis' long-standing contempt for the inferior material, social and educational conditions of the Alawis.

TABLE 3.9 Syrian ethno-religious groups

<i>Language</i>	<i>Religion</i>	<i>% of population</i>	<i>Location</i>
Arabic	Sunni Moslem	65.3	Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Hama
Arabic	Alawi Moslem	10.7	Latakia
Arabic	Druze Moslem	3.1	Jabal al-Druze
Moslem sub-total		80.7	
Arabic	Eastern Orthodox	4.5	Urban centres
Arabic	Roman Catholic	2.8	Urban centres
Arabic	Other Christians	1.8	Jezirah
		9.1	
Arabic-speaking sub-total		89.8	
Kurdish	Sunni	6.2	Border with Turkey and Iraq
Aremenian	Christian	3.5	Aleppo
Others	Yezedis, Jews	0.5	
		10.2	
		100.0	

SOURCE

Stephen Oren, 'Syria's Options', *World Today*, vol. 30 (1974) p. 474; *Middle East Review*, vol. 9 (1976) p. 66.

While sectarian outbursts have abounded since the Baath came to power in 1963, perhaps the most serious were the riots following the introduction of the new secularist Constitution in 1973. Sunni religious leaders, particularly those of the 'Moslem Brotherhood', immediately began to urge their followers to protest against the Constitution. Riots soon spread from the most

conservative Sunni-dominated towns of Homs and Hama to Aleppo and Damascus, and the violence necessitated the introduction of harsh and repressive counter-measures by the government. The rioters demanded the inclusion of a provision pertaining to the status of Islam as the official religion of the state. Slogans such as 'Islam is our constitution' and 'there is no leader but Muhammed'⁷¹ were brandished. As a result the Constitution was modified to include a stipulation that the President must be an adherent of the Islamic faith. Although the Constitution was later approved by 99.6 per cent of the voters further rioting occurred in Homs a month later on the anniversary of the birth of the Prophet Muhammed.

In consequence, President Asad and the Baathist leadership spared no effort to minimise the Sunni-Alawi distinction, especially by encouraging Sunni Ulama to declare that the Alawi sect was an integral part of Islam.⁷² Indeed, an examination of the Syrian high-policy élite in the period 1970–5 in no way suggests a striking preponderance of Alawis (see Table 3.10). Partly due to his own deeply held secularist beliefs and partly no doubt due to his efforts to allay Sunni fears, President Asad's inner decision-making circle were mostly non-Alawis. It is interesting to note that in the wake of the religious riots the sectarian break-down of Syrian society ceased to be recorded in the country's official statistical yearbook.

While actual physical violence in the form of riots and demonstrations were minimal during Syria's involvement in the Lebanese civil war, some sectarian discontent among the fundamentalist Sunni population did surface, particularly when the Syrian regime shifted its support to the Christian forces against the Moslem alliance. This domestic dissent was clearly perceived by the Baathist leadership who responded by minimising the religious element and by appealing to unifying nationalist symbols.⁷³ Nevertheless, the persistence of the Syrian leadership with its Lebanese policy and the confidence with which it executed the policy could only suggest that the popularity of the Asad-Baathist regime was able to gradually transcend religious and sectarian schisms and conflicts.

TABLE 3.10 Sectarian representation in Syria's Cabinets and the Baath Party's regional commands, 1970-6^a

<i>Religion</i>	<i>Percentage of population^b</i>	<i>Percentage of Cabinets (n)</i>	<i>Percentage of Regional Commands (RC) (n)</i>	<i>Percentage of RC^c excluding Asad (n)</i>
Sunni	68.7	82.8 (148)	69.6 (39)	73.6 (39)
Alawi	11.5	9.4 (17)	21.4 (12)	17.0 (9)
Druze	3.0	2.2 (4)	3.6 (2)	3.8 (2)
Ismaili	1.5	2.2 (4)	— (0)	— (0)
Christian	14.1	4.0 (7)	5.4 (3)	5.6 (3)
Total	98.8	100.0 (180)	100.0 (56)	100.0 (53)

NOTES

^a During this period, there were seven different Cabinets and three Regional Commands.

^b Note that these estimates are slightly different from the figures given above by Stephen Oren.

^c These figures show a decrease of three in the number of Alawi representation signifying the exclusion of the President from the three Regional Commands of this period.

SOURCE

This table is based on the findings presented in Nickolaas Van Dam, 'Sectarian and Regional Factionalism in the Syrian Political Elite', *Middle East Journal*, vol. 32 (1978) pp. 201-10.

Competing Elites

This category relates to the other political parties that joined with the Baath Party in 1972 to form the Progressive National Front (PNF). They consist of the Syrian Communist Party (SCP), the Arab Socialist Union (ASU), the Socialist Union (SU) and the Arab Socialist Party (ASP). In the parliamentary elections of May 1973, these parties, in alliance with the Baath won by a two-thirds majority.

The most important of these parties is the Communist Party. The SCP has been an active political institution since Syrian independence. Under the dynamic leadership of Khalid Bakdash, it had considerable appeal among the ranks of the intelligentsia. However, a major split in the early 1970s weakened it considerably, dividing it into two quarrelling factions, one loyally backing the strict pro-Soviet line of Bakdash, and the other

insisting on independence from Moscow under the leadership of Riadh Turk. The relations of the SCP with the Baathist leadership quickly deteriorated in late 1975 and later in 1976. In December 1975 there were reports that a number of Communist leaders were arrested as they tried to fly to Cuba for the Cuban Communist Party Congress. The reason for the arrest was the Communists' refusal to include in their delegation members of the Baath Party.⁷⁴ Throughout 1975 and 1976 the Communists were becoming increasingly alarmed with the regime's policy of economic liberalisation and with its efforts to normalise relations with Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the United States. Relations with the Baathist leadership reached their lowest ebb immediately after Syria's intervention in Lebanon against the 'Leftist' forces. During that period the Communist members of the PNF were effectively excluded from the consultative process assiduously pursued by President Asad.⁷⁵ The influence of the SCP in the decision-making process, therefore, was minimal, and its threat to the regime was negligible.

Similarly, the other parties, while commanding a wider support base among the population could hardly be considered full participants in the decision-making process. Their influence varied in relation to their accessibility to President Asad. In fact it was the President who consciously endeavoured to involve the supportive members of the PNF in the consultation, if not in the decision-making, process. During the Lebanese crisis, the non-Communist members of the PNF were regularly informed and consulted about the major Syrian decisions. With the initiative primarily emanating from the Chief Executive himself, it is clear that unlike the Baath Party, the influence of the PNF was dependent almost entirely on the goodwill and accommodative instincts of the President.

Conclusion

The influence of the various interest groups and competing elites were, as noted, marginal. The three major institutions that dominated the decision-making process in Syria during 1970–6 were the Presidency, the Party and the defence establishment. President Asad's central and authoritative position stemmed from the fact that he was the only individual who was a member of

all these institutions. The relationship between the Party and the military assumed a paradoxical competitive cooperative nature. In addition to the promotion by both institutions of organisational interests that would inevitably, in some instances, prove to be conflicting, a major source of competition between the two institutions related to the effort of each to gain primary accessibility to the President. However, the interdependence of the two institutions for the survival of the regime tended to dilute their conflictual impulses. Furthermore, ideological penetration of the armed forces by the Party considerably lessened the chances of the military developing institutional or organisational parochialism. While Baathist claims that they have created in Syria an 'ideological army' (al-Jaysh al-Aqaiidi) were obviously exaggerated,⁷⁶ nevertheless their efforts to politicise the Officer Corps in the Army did meet with some success. In a speech in 1975 President Asad revealed that 80 per cent of the army officers killed in the 1973 October war were members of the Baath Party.⁷⁷

Notwithstanding the efforts by both institutions to increase their influence, the final arbiter of power in Syria was the Chief Executive himself, President Hafiz al-Asad. The only one to be member of the three central institutions, his authority was based not only on institutional loyalty but on a widespread and genuine appeal among the Syrian population. Nevertheless, he cannot be considered a principal decision-maker—a category developed elsewhere to describe President Nasser's personal responsibility for Egypt's foreign policy.⁷⁸ Unlike a number of other contemporary Arab leaders, whose regime survival depended primarily on ensuring the loyalty of the armed forces, President Asad was constrained further by the vigorous and effective intrusion in the decision-making process of the Baath Party. For ideological and psychological reasons relating to the Party's perceived legitimising role in Syria's political system, and to the President's own adherence to Baathist ideology, Asad frequently exhibited a clear reluctance to by-pass the Party, especially in important policy decisions. As such, he remained the most central and authoritative, but not the sole, allocator of values in the Syrian political system.

NOTES

1. Brecher, op. cit., (1972) pp. 3–4.
2. Ibid., p. 5.
3. Ibid., pp. 7–10.
4. See Coral Bell, 'The October Middle East War: A Case Study in Crisis-Management During Detente', *International Affairs*, vol. 50 (1974) pp. 531–3. See also Coral Bell, *The Diplomacy of Detente: The Kissinger Era* (London: Martin Robertson, 1977); and William B. Quandt, *Decade of Decisions: American Policy toward the Arab–Israeli Conflict, 1967–1976* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).
5. *The Middle East* (London: May 1977) p. 29. However, the bulk of this aid was given in 1974 in an effort to make good Syria's losses in the October 1973 war.
6. Brecher, op. cit. (1972) p. 6.
7. Thomas Kiernan, *The Arabs: Their History, Aims and Challenge to the Industrialised World* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1975) p. 303.
8. *Financial Times* (London) 9 April 1975.
9. *Guardian* (London) 29 April 1975.
10. British Broadcasting Corporation, *Summary of World Broadcasts, Part IV, the Middle East* (hereafter cited as *SWB*), ME/4724/A/2, 30 October 1974.
11. Brecher, op. cit. (1972) p. 8.
12. See W. B. Fisher, 'Syria: Physical and Social Geography', in *The Middle East and North Africa, 1976–77*, 23rd edn (London: Europa Publications, 1976), p. 563; also, George Antonious insists that Syria means 'the whole country of that name, which is now split up into the mandated territories of (French) Syria and the Lebanon, and British Palestine and Transjordan'. *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1945), p. 15, f.n.l. Albert Hourani has similarly argued that the term 'Syria' has 'in the past . . . often been used to refer to the whole area stretching from the Taurus mountains in the north to the Sinai Peninsula in the south, and from the Mediterranean Sea on the West to the Syrian Desert on the east' Hourani, op. cit., p. 4. It is also interesting to note that the King-Crane Commission, set up by President Wilson in 1919, recommended that Lebanon be given 'considerable local autonomy but only as a constituent part of a large Syrian state'. Hudson, op. cit., p. 41; see also Petran, op. cit., p. 56.
13. Fisher, op. cit., p. 563.
14. *SWB*, ME/5266/A/2, 22 July 1976.
15. *SWB*, ME/4941/A/7, 28 June 1975.
16. See Bulloch, op. cit., p. 113; also McLaurin, op. cit., p. 260.
17. For a discussion of the importance of military expenditure on the ranking of a particular state in the international system, see David O. Wilkinson, *Comparative Foreign Relations: Framework and Methods*, Belmont, California: Dickenson Publishing Company, Inc., 1969, pp. 53–61.
18. See Dawisha, op. cit., (1976) p. 186.
19. See Bulloch, op. cit., p. 142.
20. *Events* (London) 3 December 1976, p. 20.
21. *SWB*, ME/5267/A/3, 23 July 1976.

22. The twenty-one states are Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, North Yemen, South Yemen.
23. International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 1976–1977*, pp. 26–40.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 34–8. It must be noted, however, that Israel's forces can reach 300,000 during mobilisation.
25. Brecher, *op. cit.*, (1972) p. 69.
26. According to a demographic survey conducted by the Ministry for Social Affairs. Cited in Anne Sinai and Allen Pollock, *The Syrian Arab Republic: A Handbook*, (New York: American Academic Association for Peace in the Middle East (1976) p. 61.
27. Nadav Safran, 'Arab Politics: Peace and War', *Orbis*, vol. 18 (1974) p. 394.
28. This section is based on the excellent analysis by W. B. Fisher in *The Middle East and North Africa, 1976–1977*, pp. 662–7.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 663.
30. See the interview given by the Minister of the Euphrates Dam, Subhi Kahaleh in *The Middle East* (London) October 1977, pp. 73–5.
31. *Financial Times* (London) 16 November 1977.
32. Fisher, *op. cit.*, p. 664; see also *al-Ahram*, (Cairo) 28 May 1976.
33. Antoine Guine, *The New Syria* (Damascus: SAMA, 1975) pp. 15–25.
34. According to a statement by the Governor of the Central Bank of Syria, which was quoted in *Middle East Economic Digest*, 7 April 1977, p. 27.
35. Dawisha, *op. cit.*, (1976) p. 86.
36. *Observer Foreign News Service* (London) 28 November 1975.
37. Guine, *op. cit.*, p. 103.
38. Dawisha, *op. cit.*, (1974) p. 27.
39. See George Lenczowski, 'Socialism in Syria', in Helen Desfosses and Jacques Levesque, *Socialism and the Third World* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975), pp. 55–76.
40. See Dawisha, *op. cit.*, (1974) pp. 27–31.
41. *The Times* (London) 28 May 1973.
42. Raymond A. Hinnebusch, 'Local Politics in Syria: Organisation and Mobilisation in Four Village Cases', *Middle East Journal*, vol. 30 (1976) p. 5.
43. Kiernan, *op. cit.*, p. 297.
44. *The Middle East* (London) May 1977, p. 29.
45. The Syrian Constitution, Articles 3, 112. Quoted in McLaurin, *op. cit.* p. 228.
46. *SWB*, ME/4882/A/3, 19 April 1975.
47. See for example, *SWB*, ME/4774/A/8–9, 6 August 1975; *SWB*, ME/5014/A/7, 23 September 1975, *SWB*, ME/5015/A/2–3, 24 September 1975.
48. *International Herald Tribune* (Paris) 2 September 1974.
49. *The Financial Times* (London) 16 April 1975.
50. *Guardian* (London) 2 August 1976.
51. Leonard Binder, 'Political Recruitment and Participation in Egypt', in J. La Palombara and Myron Weiner (eds.), *Political Parties and Political*

- Development* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966) p. 227.
52. *New York Times*, 9 August 1976.
 53. See for example *The Financial Times* (London) 18 May 1976; *The Times* (London) 21 May 1976; *International Herald Tribune* (Paris) 5 June 1976.
 54. Interview with the Syrian Ambassador in the United Kingdom, Mr Adnan Omran, 7 October 1977.
 55. Brecher, op. cit., (1972) p. 9.
 56. *Al-Hayat* (Beirut), 25 February 1966.
 57. Petran, op. cit., p. 248.
 58. *The Times* (London), 14 November 1970.
 59. Petran, op. cit., p. 235.
 60. McLaurin, op. cit., pp. 237, 267.
 61. *New York Times*, 2 August 1976; *Guardian* (London) 2 August 1976.
 62. These classifications were fully elaborated in G. A. Almond and G. Powell, *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach* (New York: Little Brown, 1966), chs. iii and v. The categories were imaginatively used in Brecher, op. cit. (1972) ch. 7.
 63. Brecher, op. cit., (1972) p. 10.
 64. Heinrich Bechtold, 'Arab Arabesques: Socialism and Its Structures', *Aussen Politik*, vol. 26 (1975) p. 448.
 65. Petran, op. cit., p. 207.
 66. Guine, op. cit., p. 39.
 67. Hinnebusch, op. cit., p. 6.
 68. *Al-Baath* (Damascus), 17 August 1977.
 69. Brecher, op. cit., (1972) p. 10.
 70. Stephen Oren, 'Syria's Options', *The World Today*, vol. 30 (1974) p. 473.
 71. A. R. Kelidar, 'Religion and State in Syria', *Asian Affairs*, vol. 61 (1974) p. 17.
 72. Ibid., p. 18; McLaurin, op. cit., p. 238.
 73. *SWB*, ME/5185/A/6-7, 14 April 1976.
 74. *New York Times*, 26 December 1975.
 75. Interviews with Iskander and Omran.
 76. See Petran, op. cit., p. 234.
 77. *SWB*, ME/4976/A/3, 8 August 1975.
 78. Dawisha, op. cit., (1976) pp. 97-107.

Part Two

Pre-Crisis Period

23 May 1975–18 January 1976

4 Decisions and Environment

Decisions

In the pre-crisis period, the Syrian decision-makers met frequently to discuss the evolving conflict in Lebanon. While they naturally took many decisions, most of these were routine implementing decisions that had very little, if any, consequence for the development of the situation in Lebanon. Only three of these decisions were major, in the sense that they entailed the utilisation of Syrian capability and had a discernible impact on the operational environment. The first two of these decisions were taken in the first phase of the pre-crisis period (23 May–31 August 1975), and the third was taken during the second phase (1 September 1975–18 January 1976).

Decision One was taken on 24 May 1975 and involving the despatch of Foreign Minister Abd al-Halim Khaddam and Commander of the Air Force and Chief of National Security Naji Jamil on the first of a series of peace missions to Lebanon. This was in response to the formation in Lebanon of a 'military Cabinet' under the premiership of Brigadier Nur al-Din Rifai. The Syrian diplomatic intervention was instrumental in the hasty resignation of the military cabinet.

Decision Two was taken on 28 June 1975. Foreign Minister Khaddam was again sent to Beirut to resolve the political deadlock which had for over a month prevented the Lebanese Prime Minister, Rashid Karami, from forming a Cabinet. The day following Khaddam's arrival, a new, six-member government was formed in which neither al-Kata'ib nor the Jumblatt coalition was represented.

Decision Three was taken on 18 September 1975, leading to the despatch of Khaddam and the Syrian Chief of Staff Hikmat

Shihabi on yet another peace mission in response to the rapid escalation in the fighting in which the Lebanese Army took an active part. The two emissaries succeeded in arranging a cease-fire and forming the 'Committee of National Reconciliation', whose membership included major figures of the various conflicting parties.

The Decision-Makers

During the pre-crisis period, a 'decision-making committee',¹ formed by President Asad on an *ad hoc* basis, was made responsible for closely following the situation in Lebanon, monitoring developments to the Presidency and the two Commands of the Party, and formulating Syrian responses. The committee consisted of:

Lieutenant-General

Hafiz al-Asad: President of the Republic, Secretary-General of the Baath Party, Chairman of the Committee.

Abd al-Halim Khaddam: Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Member of the Regional and National Commands of the Baath Party.

Major-General Naji
Jamil:

Deputy Defence Minister, Chief of the Air Force, Head of National Security, Member of the National Command of the Baath Party.

Major-General Hikmat
Shihabi:

Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces. Before his appointment as Chief of Staff, he was Director of Military Intelligence.

The institutional composition of the committee reflected the importance to the Syrian decision-makers of Lebanon and the concern with which they perceived Lebanese security. The committee included senior representatives of the Foreign Ministry, armed forces and the internal security apparatus.

Equally important was the fact that three of the four decision-makers were high-ranking members of the Baath Party. Asad and Khaddam were, without question, the two most senior and influential members of the Party. Jamil was a member of the National Command, and until the party elections of April 1975, had also been a member of the Regional Command. Only Shihabi was not a member of either of the Party's two Commands, but he was a long-standing, card-carrying member of the Party. Nevertheless, it does seem that Shihabi owed his inclusion in the committee primarily to his institutional affiliation with the armed forces. This does not mean that he was the primary representative of the military's interests—a role usually played by the Minister of Defence, Lieutenant-General Mustafa Tlas, who at no time was directly involved in the decision-making process.² Rather, as the Chief of the Army, Shihabi was the person most qualified to advise on the military aspects of the conflict, and ultimately would have the responsibility for implementing any decision entailing the use of the armed forces.

The Psychological Environment

Two intrinsic characteristics of the decision-making group during the pre-crisis period need to be noted. Firstly, the decisional unit was very small, highly centralised and extremely cohesive, and as a result the likelihood of inter-personal or inter-institutional conflict was considerably minimised. Secondly, as longstanding adherents to Baathist ideology, the four decision-makers tended to hold common normative orientations. The small size of the group and its ideological cohesiveness contributed to a high degree of perceptual uniformity among the members of the group, particularly in their value-orientation. Even the civil-military division in the group was bridged by the common bond of party allegiance and by the authoritative presence of the Chief Executive who assumed and personally combined both institutional roles. Due to this perceptual consistency and the congruence of values, the members of the 'decision-making committee' will be treated collectively as a coherent unit when their attitudinal prisms and their images of the environment are analysed. This should not be taken to imply the total absence of perceptual variation. Nevertheless, these variations were on the

whole the exceptions to the rule and they related to matters of degree rather than substance.

Values and Attitudes

As has been indicated, the inter-societal conflict in Lebanon marked the beginning of the pre-crisis period for the Syrian decision-makers because it signalled the possibility of a fundamental and irreparable disintegration of Lebanon. On ideological, emotional and strategic grounds, the Syrian leadership considered the preservation of Lebanon as an internally coherent and communally united entity to be an essential Syrian value. This was true for a number of reasons.

In the first place, the Syrians have always believed that Lebanon and Syria are integral parts of 'Greater Syria', and that the divisions between the two countries were artificially created by the French to serve their own colonial interests. For instance, Syria does not keep an embassy in Lebanon and there are no restrictions of movement between the two countries. President Asad himself frequently stressed the 'historic indivisibility' of the two countries. To Asad, the Syrians and Lebanese 'are one people. What binds us is stronger than any treaty. Syria is concerned with defending Lebanon and Lebanon is concerned with defending Syria, whether this is written on paper or not.'³ Accordingly, 'it is difficult to draw a line between Lebanon's security in its broadest sense and Syria's security.'⁴ This 'historic indivisibility' constituted a fundamental value of Syria's policy towards the Lebanon.

The possible political and social disintegration of Lebanon would furthermore undermine not only Syria's traditional perception of itself as the birthplace and guardian of 'Arab nationalism', but also its obstinate adherence to the often tried but seldom successful concept of Arab unity—a principle upon which the institutional legitimacy of the Baathist ruling elite has for over a decade uncomfortably rested. President Asad, therefore, was one of the diminishing number of Arab leaders who would still insist that 'Arab unity as far as we are concerned takes priority over any other aim. It is an aim for which we are struggling continuously. The fact that we have not achieved much in this field so far does not mean that we feel pessimistic or have

despaired. The issue, as far as we are concerned, is a permanent aim which requires continuous effort on our part.'⁵ Given this perception, the Syrian decision-makers were bound to resist vigorously any possible 'balkanisation' of the Middle East, especially if this were to happen along religious lines, given Syria's own sectarian schisms.

A religious dislocation in Lebanon would also expose the conceptual and operational weakness inherent in the zealously espoused and highly publicised aspirational goal of a 'secular democratic Palestine'. As Rashid Karami, Syria's foremost supporter in Lebanon explained:

If partition takes place, it will be the greatest possible service to Israel, because it will represent a support for the racism on which Israel has been founded and a repudiation of the solid argument which the Palestinian Resistance has put forward when it offered Lebanon as an example of the coexistence of communities under democratic rule.⁶

According to one high Syrian official, the Syrian decision-makers were convinced 'from the very beginning of the Lebanese civil war that Israel would vigorously use the sectarian conflict in Lebanon to vindicate the Israeli refusal to democratise its system and accept the Palestinians back into a secular state'.⁷ In other words the Israelis would justifiably argue that if the Arabs themselves could not coexist in one country because of religious differences, why should the Palestinians and their Syrian mentors expect Israeli Jews and Palestinian Moslems and Christians to live harmoniously in a future secular state.

Finally, the Syrian decision-makers were convinced that the partition of Lebanon would give Israel the pretext to move into Southern Lebanon and occupy the area up to the Litani River. According to the Syrians the Litani River, along with the River Jordan, the Golan Heights and Sinai have always formed the basis of Israel's quest for natural borders with her hostile neighbours.⁸ In an interview given after the termination of the crisis, President Asad remarked: 'If the Syrian army had not entered those areas (the Beqa' valley and Southern Lebanon), Israel would have intervened and the leaders of the Palestinian Resistance would have become refugees in Syria.'⁹ Apart from Syria's ideological antipathy to such an 'expansionist' move, an

Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon would provide Israel with a new front in any future confrontation with Syria. This would result in increasing Syria's strategic vulnerability, particularly after Egypt's perceived withdrawal from the Arab-Israeli conflict in the wake of the interim Sinai agreement of September 1975.

Moreover, if an annexation by Israel of Southern Lebanon were to happen there would almost certainly occur a corresponding decline in Syria's status and influence in the regional and international systems—a situation that could be exploited by Syria's main competitors in the region, especially Iraq and Egypt. Furthermore, an Israeli annexation of a part of Lebanon would necessitate one of two responses from Syria, neither of which would ultimately serve the interests of Syria's political elite. First, the Syrians could become involved in a precipitous military confrontation with Israel, which, given the balance of forces in 1975, would have almost certainly resulted in a massive and humiliating defeat for Syria with all its domestic consequences. Second, the Syrian leaders could respond passively and limit their reaction to verbal condemnations and diplomatic activity, thus evading an armed confrontation with Israel. Yet for a population that has been vigorously socialised into accepting its role as the historic and natural protector of Lebanon, physical inactivity on the part of Syria could lead to social and political disquiet.

Images

The one constant factor during this period was the persistence of the favourable image of the Soviet Union held by the Syrian decision-makers. The Soviet Union was perceived as a fraternal power, and relations between the two countries reflected this perceptual cordiality. Economic, political and cultural interaction occurred at every level, and delegations representing a variety of bureaucratic and party institutions exchanged frequent visits. Indeed, in October 1975 President Asad paid an official visit to the Soviet Union in which he solicited and received Soviet support for Syrian regional policies. During the same month a new and impressive Soviet cultural centre was opened in Damascus, and the occasion was attended by many members of the Baath Party's National and Regional Commands, in order to

emphasise the 'enduring friendship between the two countries'.¹⁰ In this the Syrians were no wide-eyed idealists. They fully recognised that the Soviets supported Syria 'with its own interest in mind—that is to combat the expansion of American power. But . . . Soviet interest coincides with ours.'¹¹ Thus, with the realisation that the interests of both countries would be served by limiting the conflict-resolution and mediatory role to Syria, the Soviet Union continued to support Syrian regional activities, particularly the efforts undertaken by the Damascus regime during the pre-crisis period to mediate in Lebanon's civil war.¹²

With regards to the other superpower, Syrian perceptions were more neutral. On the one hand, there was a rational acceptance of United States influence in the area and a clear appreciation of America's potential as an economic partner. On this, President Asad was very candid: 'Why should I boycott the United States when I can refuse anything that is not compatible with our interests. Our relations with the Soviet Union are good and we wish our relations with the United States were good too.'¹³ This conciliatory perception, however, was counter-balanced by a much deeper suspicion of the United States' intentions and activities in the area, particularly its special relationship with Israel. According to President Asad:

America has supported Israel in the interests of its own imperialism, to keep a sphere of influence here. . . . America has supported Israel for all these years knowing completely in its mind that we could not tolerate Israel in our midst . . . the United States has been the cause of all our recent problems. Had we been able to eliminate the Israel situation long time ago, we would by now have solved many of our other problems. But the United States prevented us from doing so.¹⁴

Thus, although an effort to normalise relations with the United States was certainly undertaken by the Syrian decision-makers, a deep-rooted, bad-faith model tended to characterise Syrian images of United States activity in the Middle East during the pre-crisis period. This was especially the case in the second phase of the period when the Egyptian–Israeli Sinai interim agreement of September 1975 was seen by the Syrian leaders as a plot by the Americans designed to neutralise Egypt, thus maintaining the

existing balance of power in the area, which to the Syrians was heavily in favour of Israel. In an interview with *Newsweek*, conducted after the signing of the interim agreement, President Asad said that 'the intention of United States policy in the coming phase is to anaesthetise the situation in the area'.¹⁵ Furthermore, in Syrian perceptions, the interim agreement and the situation in Lebanon were closely and causally linked. To the Syrian leadership, 'the striking increase in the fighting in Lebanon[in September] was part of a premeditated plan designed to pre-occupy Syria and divert her attention from the Sinai agreement'.¹⁶ Similarly, in a press conference, Foreign Minister Khaddam was adamant that the latest round of fighting in Lebanon was perpetrated by 'those who wanted to ensure the success of the Sinai agreement'.¹⁷ There can be no doubt that in the case of the United States, the 'conspiracy theory' tended to dominate the Syrian perceptual prism.

Endeavouring to counter this negative image, the United States assumed the role of the neutral mediator in the Lebanese civil war. The Americans seemed particularly anxious to avoid the impression that the United States supported the Christians against the Moslems.¹⁸ Thus, in November 1975, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger sent a message to the Lebanese Moslem Prime Minister, Rashid Karami, deliberately by-passing the Christian Maronite President Suleiman Franjeh. It read: 'I want you to know that my government very much hopes to see an end to the fighting in Lebanon and fully supports your government in its efforts to bring this about. I hope there will emerge a process of accommodation leading to a new basis of stability with security for all your countrymen.'¹⁹ Indeed, there is no evidence that the United States acted outside these parameters of neutrality during this period. Nevertheless, the Syrian negative image of United States intentions and activities in the area generally and in Lebanon particularly persisted throughout the pre-crisis period.

There were no articulated Syrian perceptions of other global actors. This is perhaps because, due to lack of capabilities, no other global actor made an impact on Syria's decision-making towards Lebanon during this period. France and the Vatican did despatch envoys in an effort to help resolve the civil war, but these missions were essentially confined to the local situation and had very little influence on Syrian activities and perceptions. Thus, during the pre-crisis period, the only relevant global actors, as far

as the Syrian decision-makers were concerned, were the Soviet Union and the United States.

In the regional environment, Syria's dominant relations were those with the Palestinian Movement. Syria perceived itself as the natural protector of the Palestinians and the ultimate guarantor of their security. The Syrian posture regarding the Palestinians' position in Lebanon was elaborated thus in a Damascus Radio broadcast in September 1975:

Syria appreciates the special circumstances of sisterly Lebanon. The Arab people of Syria hope that their Arab brothers in Lebanon will soon resolve their differences so that peace and tranquillity can be restored, and Syria is sparing no effort in helping our brothers in Lebanon achieve this goal. Moreover, Syria will stand steadfastly against any conspiratorial attempts to liquidate the heroic Palestinian Resistance in Lebanon or in the area generally.²⁰

Throughout 1975, therefore, Syria vigorously supported the Palestinian cause. It gave refuge to some 200,000 Palestinians; it housed not only the guerrilla group al-Saiqa, but also the crack Yarmouk Brigade of the well-equipped Palestine Liberation Army (PLA); and it lent the Palestinian cause diplomatic support in every conceivable way, particularly in the United Nations.

In complete contrast, Syrian images of Israel during this period were characterised by extreme suspicion, mistrust and antagonism. President Asad's mistrust of Israel's intentions was clearly echoed in an interview in which he defined Israeli objectives as 'the entrenchment of Israeli occupation of Arab lands, and carrying out aggressive acts against the Arabs'.²¹ This perceptual antipathy was indeed universalised throughout the Arab world and was carried through at all levels. After the first clashes in Lebanon in April 1975, Prime Minister Rashid al-Sulh alleged that between 200 and 250 Israeli agents had entered the Lebanon with faked passports to foment trouble and provoke fighting.²² Arab suspicion of Israel was such, and in this Syria was no exception, that such statements would be immediately and unquestioningly accepted at face value. Thus, when asked where would Israel renew the fighting, President Asad immediately replied: 'The situation in Lebanon, for example, and the possibility of Israel attempting to exploit it.'²³ Nevertheless, here again

the Syrian decision-makers endeavoured to counter-balance their innate hostility towards Israel with a rational assessment of relative capabilities. President Asad put it thus:

There is a great struggle taking place between heart and mind. In our hearts we say: 'No Israel, not on any terms.' In our minds we say: 'We must turn to other things, so let us give Israel a chance to withdraw to its original frontiers, let us give it a chance to prove it will no longer try to expand.' It is a very difficult problem.²⁴

A similar level of suspicion characterised Israeli perceptions of Syria's intentions and activities in Lebanon. Israel, fearful of possible Syrian domination of Lebanon, issued a number of warnings during 1975 which were designed to restrain Syrian involvement in Lebanon. In September 1975, for example, Foreign Minister Yigal Allon stated that Israel will not remain indifferent to the developments in Lebanon, 'especially when other Arab countries are liable to interfere in what happens there. I should not like Syria, for instance, to interpret the new situation in which no great power intervenes as giving her a licence to intervene herself.'²⁵ Characterised by threats and counter-threats, Syrian-Israeli relations in the pre-crisis period reflected the more general political and perceptual polarity that had pervaded relations between the two countries since Israel's inception in 1948.

Syrian perceptions of Egypt during the pre-crisis period proved to be highly variable. If the first five months of the Lebanese civil war (phase one of the pre-crisis period), the Egyptians were certainly not averse to the Syrian role in Lebanon and, as a result, Syrian perceptions of Egypt were highly positive.²⁶ However, this cordiality came to an abrupt end with the Egyptian signing of the interim agreement with Israel on 1 September 1975. The Syrians believed that the provisions of the agreement neutralised Egypt from the Arab-Israeli conflict. The various restrictions placed by the agreement on the composition and movement of the Egyptian Army in Sinai convinced the Syrian decision-makers that Egypt would hardly be in a position to activate the war option against Israel, let alone to coordinate plans with its Syrian ally. The National Command of the Baath Party issued a statement calling the agreement 'a serious setback for the march of the Arab

struggle [which accords] real gains to the enemy'.²⁷ President Asad went further:

The Sinai agreement has come to work in a direction opposite to the achievement of just peace. We have defined our attitudes to this agreement on the basis that it does not serve the peace we are seeking, because it distorts the real issue—the Palestinian problem, it divides Arab ranks through piecemeal negotiations, and it accords a victory to Israel through the neutralisation of the Egyptian front.²⁸

As a result of the Sinai agreement, therefore, Syrian perceptions of the Egyptian leadership during the second phase became extremely negative, and indeed continued to be so throughout the following more crucial period.

Syrian perceptions of the Iraqi leaders were similarly, even more bitterly, hostile. These negative perceptions were due not so much to Syrian fears of a direct Iraqi involvement in Lebanon, but to an innate Syrian conviction that the rival Baathist rulers in Baghdad were actively involved in efforts to destabilise the Syrian regime. Foreign Minister Abd al-Halim Khaddam clearly voiced these sentiments:

Notwithstanding the weight of our burdens, the Syrian region shoulders them willingly, standing on the front line of the struggle for the national cause. . . . Despite all this, the suspect right-wing in Iraq is making moves to stab this region in the back . . . at a time when the Arab nation is expecting the Iraqi forces to take up their positions in the front line against the Israeli enemy. . . . There is great faith in our region that our patient masses in Iraq are in their hearts attached to Syria, the fighter; to Syria, which is now facing Zionist-imperialist plots.²⁹

This perception was not confined to the few individuals at the top of the policy-making elite. It pervaded the entire decision-making structure. Thus, the National Command of the Baath Party in Syria issued a statement calling the Iraqi regime 'the right wing fascist authorities in Iraq—a regime of executions, blood and gallows; a regime drowning in isolation'.³⁰ These fiercely held perceptions at the party level naturally acted as positive reinforce-

ments for the images held by the high-level decision-makers, thus contributing to a state of almost complete perceptual polarity between the two Baathist regimes.

In complete contrast, Syrian images of Jordan were extremely positive. During his official visit to Amman in June 1975, which was the first by any Syrian President for twenty years, President Asad emphatically declared: 'Since our arrival in this sisterly country, we have increasingly felt that we are among our kinsmen and brothers. . . . We are the sons of one people with one hope and one destiny.'³¹ These were indeed strange sentiments coming from someone who was directly involved in the decision to despatch Syrian armoured units into northern Jordan during the September 1970 civil war. However, since then President Asad and the Syrian leadership had become aware of Jordan's strategic importance in any plan to build an effective eastern front against Israel. The Syrians, therefore, endeavoured to overcome their earlier negative images of Jordan by perceptually treating the Syrian-Jordanian clashes of September 1970 as an aberrant episode in a long history of geographic, cultural and linguistic unity. Thus, after his return to Amman, President Asad explained the objectives of his visit:

My visit to Jordan was part of the effort to consolidate the Arab front. . . . We can achieve what we desire between ourselves, Jordan and the Palestine Liberation Organisation if we can provide the factor of confidence . . . it has become the duty of us all to work for overcoming the complexes we have experienced, especially since the responsibility for the past incidents falls on all of us . . . must Arab history come to a standstill because of the September complex?³²

During the visit Asad and Hussein set up a 'Supreme Ministerial Committee' to oversee and coordinate the policies of the two countries, and they also agreed to hasten the process of establishing an effective unified military command for the eastern front. These burgeoning bonds were further consolidated during King Hussein's own visit to Damascus two months later, when it was agreed that a 'Supreme Political Command' composed of Asad and Hussein should be established to formulate decisions, and issue instructions and directives on the recommendations referred to it by the Joint Ministerial Committee. Given these

mushrooming ties, there was no question of Jordan's support for Syria's efforts to resolve the Lebanese impasse in the pre-crisis period.

Similar perceptual change occurred with regard to Saudi Arabia. It was certainly unthinkable in 1970 for the Marxist-oriented Syria of Salah Jadid to have positive images of the 'reactionary' and 'autocratic' regime of Saudi Arabia. However, under the influence of Asad's more pragmatic leadership a radical transformation in Syrian perceptions of Saudi Arabia gradually emerged. Indeed, by 1975 the Syrian leaders had become very well disposed towards the Saudi rulers. Thus the Syrians insisted that their decision in June 1975 to re-supply the Iraqis with their requirements of the Euphrates water was made 'in the light of the good offices made available by the fraternal kingdom of Saudi Arabia'.³³ This perceptual change occurred not only because of Saudi Arabia's pivotal role in the underpinning the Syrian economy, but also because 'the President and the Syrian leadership appreciated the value of Arab solidarity, particularly in the period following the October 1973 war and the evolving circumstances of the Lebanese civil conflict'.³⁴ Here again, the pragmatism of the Syrian leadership contributed to a radical change in Syrian perceptions of an important regional actor with considerable influence in Lebanese politics.

Of all the regional actors in the Middle East, theoretically, the one most qualified to resolve the Lebanese conflict was the Arab League. As a regional organisation created by the Arab states themselves in 1945 for the purpose of strengthening relations between them, coordinating their policies, peacefully resolving inter-Arab conflict, and working for the general interests of the Arab countries,³⁵ the League was extremely ineffective in its 'conflict-resolution' role in Lebanon. This was partly due to Syrian perceptions of the League, which were generally ambivalent. From the very beginning of the civil war the Syrians were against 'Arabising' the conflict, and they were inclined to perceive the efforts undertaken by the League to resolve the Lebanese conflict as a medium for introducing other Arab actors into Lebanon. This suspicion increased considerably in the second phase of the pre-crisis period when Arab League efforts to mediate in Lebanon were seen in Damascus as a ploy to help Egypt out of its isolation following the Sinai agreement. Thus, for example, in response to a mission undertaken by the League's

Secretary-General, Mahmoud Riadh, in December 1975, a Lebanese paper which faithfully reflected Syrian thinking alleged that 'the Secretary-General was trying to undermine Syria's endeavours to extricate Lebanon from the conflict . . . and to pave the way for Egyptian intervention in Lebanon'.³⁶ This kind of thinking characterised Syrian attitudes towards the Arab League throughout the second phase of the pre-crisis period, thus contributing in no small measure to the failure of the League to effect a resolution to the conflict in Lebanon.

There were very few articulated Syrian images of the domestic environment during this period. This was probably a reflection of the Syrian leadership's confidence in the situation inside Syria. The October 1973 war had acted as an effective unifying agent for Syria's diverse ethnic and religious groups, and as a result there was a genuine mass-based approval of, and support for, the President and his policies. Militarily, the Syrian armed forces had performed relatively well in the October 1973 war and in the 'Mount Hermon War' during spring 1974. Also, the military equipment received from the Soviet Union in the two years following the October war was quantitatively and qualitatively satisfactory. The Syrian leaders were thus reasonably happy and quietly confident about the country's social cohesion and military capability, particularly with regard to the issue of the Lebanese civil war.

Only in the economic sector was there a visible elite disquiet. Liberalising the Syrian economy had certainly contributed to a substantial boom following considerable Arab and American private investment in the country. However, this led to an emerging gulf between the increasing strength of the private sector and the Baath Party's 'socialist' doctrines. Thus, in a strong editorial, *al-Baath*, the articulator of party orthodoxy, stressed the need for massive investment in the public sector during the Fourth Five-Year Plan. Only by turning to the 'production sector would the country be able to overcome the negative aspects that have created a series of parasitic groups which feed on the economy, such as brokers, middlemen, property and land speculators'. The paper went on to call for 'releasing funds owned by the private sector in order to employ it constructively for transforming capital into machinery and equipment'.³⁷ However, this concern was balanced by the growing support accorded to the leadership by the important middle classes as a result of the

economic liberalisation measures. Accordingly, the Syrian decision-makers' perceptions of the country's military, domestic and economic situations were on the whole positive, brimming with satisfaction and confidence in the future. This was particularly important as the country's involvement in the Lebanese affair gradually increased during the pre-crisis period.

NOTES

1. Interviews with Iskander, Dawoodi and al-Khani.
2. Iskander and Dawoodi interviews. Similar opinions were voiced by al-Khani and Dr Rafiq Jweijati, Director-General of the West European Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who was interviewed on 7 January 1978.
3. *SWB*, ME/4973/A/1, 5 August 1975.
4. *SWB*, ME/4941/A/7, 28 June 1975.
5. *SWB*, ME/5074/A/9, 2 December 1975.
6. *SWB*, ME/5172/A/8, 30 March 1976.
7. Al-Khani interview.
8. Interview with Mr Zuhair Jinan, the Director of External Relations at the Ministry of Information, 5 January 1978; Interview with Adnan Omran, the Syrian Ambassador to the United Kingdom, 7 October 1977.
9. *Events* (London), 1 October 1976, p. 20.
10. *SWB*, ME/5035/A/11, 17 October 1975.
11. Kiernan, op. cit., p. 300.
12. It might be interesting to note that apart from a consideration of its interests in the area, the Soviet Union seems to have been motivated in their support for Syria's mediatory activities in Lebanon by a more basic and much deeper intellectual concern over the possibility of local conflicts spreading into the global arena and involving the two superpowers. In an article appearing in the influential Soviet journal, *International Affairs*, which although written in June 1974, nevertheless represented a fundamental Soviet attitudinal concern, crises were deemed to be dangerous to world peace and security for the following reasons: (1) the existence of nuclear weapons, for which the threat exists only in the case of an international crisis; (2) the universal nature of crises, which rapidly, almost instantaneously, involve directly or indirectly the major powers of the world and the military coalitions, and because of the global system of communications, mass media and military and technical means that make it possible to concentrate forces in the crisis area in unprecedented short time; (3) a substantial danger is presented by the 'uncontrolled element' within modern international crises, that is a package of factors which allow various local aggressive forces to create situations sharpening the conflict and pushing the major imperialist powers to more vigorous action than they had been prepared to engage in. Israel's numerous aggressive acts offer striking examples of such actions; (4) crises lead to explosions of international tension, a revival of the cold war, and can slow

down the process of detente and sharpen relations between the great powers; (5) they whip up the arms race, involving not only conventional weapons, which are used in local armed conflicts, but also strategic weapons; (6) crises can seriously undermine international economic relations. Quoted in Galia Golan, *Yom Kippur and After: The Soviet Union and the Middle East Crisis* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977) pp. 245–6.

13. *SWB*, ME/4941/A/4, 28 June 1975.
14. Kiernan, op. cit., pp. 300–2.
15. *SWB*, ME/5009/A/17, 17 September 1975.
16. Iskander interview.
17. *SWB*, ME/5018/A/4, 27 September 1975.
18. See the references to this in President Asad's speech, *SWB*, ME/5267/A/5, 23 July 1976.
19. *New York Times*, 25 November 1975.
20. *SWB*, ME/5009/A/8, 17 September 1975.
21. *SWB*, ME/4996/A/1, 1 September 1975.
22. *The Times* (London), 19 April 1975.
23. *SWB*, ME/5009/A/17, 17 September 1975.
24. Kiernan, op. cit., pp. 303–4.
25. *New York Times*, 21 September 1975.
26. See, for example, *al-Baath* (Damascus), 20 May 1975.
27. *SWB*, ME/4999/A/8, 5 September 1975.
28. *SWB*, ME/5009/A/17–18, 17 September 1975.
29. *SWB*, ME/4882/A/3, 19 April 1975.
30. *SWB*, ME/5021/A/1, 1 October 1975.
31. *SWB*, ME/4927/A/8, 12 June 1975.
32. *SWB*, ME/4941/A/6–7, 28 June 1975.
33. *SWB*, ME/4921/A/4, 5 June 1975.
34. Al-Dawoodi interview.
35. For a brief analysis of the establishment of the Arab League, see Majid Khadduri, 'Toward Arab Union', *American Political Science Review*, vol. XL (1946), pp. 90–100; see also Robert W. Macdonald, *The League of Arab States: A Study in the Dynamics of Regional Organization* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965).
36. *Al-Sharq* (Beirut) 29 December 1975.
37. *Al-Baath* (Damascus) 4 December 1975.

5 Decision Process

Phase One: 23 May–31 August 1975

On 13 April 1975, an unidentified car opened fire at a church in the Christian suburb of Ain Rumanah killing four men, two of whom were members of al-Kata'ib, the militant Christian paramilitary organisation. In the evening of the same day, al-Kata'ib militia ambushed a bus full of Palestinians killing twenty-seven and wounding nineteen, not one of whom apparently was a guerrilla. Full-scale fighting involving mortar and heavy machine-gun fire immediately enveloped Beirut. The next day heavy clashes between Palestinians, joined by armed communists, Nasserists and Baathists on the one hand, and al-Kata'ib supported by ex-President Chamoun's own militia on the other hand, spread from the capital to Tripoli, Sidon, Tyre and other towns.¹ It was only after the hurried mediatory intervention of the Arab League's Secretary-General, Mahmoud Riadh, that a cease-fire was concluded on 16 April, which led to the conflicting parties withdrawing their armed men from the streets and public buildings. While the cease-fire (the first in a long series) put a halt to the immediate fighting, the conflictual parties used the temporary lull to regroup, rearm and rekindle their eagerness for the future battles.

The initial military clashes were followed by the usual political squabbles that had characterised the Lebanese political system since the country's inception. This time, however, it was evident that the positions of the various political groupings were hopelessly polarised, thus serving only to prolong and fuel the existing impasse. On 26 April, the 'National Movement', a coalition of Moslem and Leftist groups and organisations led by the Druze chieftain Kamal Jumblatt announced that it would place a veto on any government that included members of al-Kata'ib. This declaration acted as a unifying agent for the multifarious Christian parties, groups and militias. Camille Chamoun's

National Liberal Party (NLP) insisted that its representation in any future government would be conditional on the inclusion of al-Kata'ib. The very influential Maronite monks, represented by the intransigently militant Father Sharbil Qassis, declared their unequivocal support for al-Kata'ib and promised to place all the resources of the Maronite monastic orders at the disposal of the Christian forces. The involvement of the Church in this political issue was reinforced by the intervention of the Maronite Patriarch, Antonious Khuraish, who intimated that the Jumblatt veto was unacceptable to the Church. Even more significant was the attitude of the Maronite President, Suleiman Franjeh, who registered his total opposition to the Jumblatt move, and who indicated his willingness to use strong measures to combat it.

Endeavouring to force the issue, two Kata'ib Ministers in the Cabinet of Rashid al-Sulh resigned in the first week of May. This course of action was immediately emulated by three NLP Ministers, and as cabinet resignations gathered momentum over the following week, the Premier had no option but to tender his government's resignation on 15 May 1975. Conflicting political interests, intense personal rivalries and divergent sectarian loyalties contributed to a complete political deadlock over the composition of a new Cabinet. As the governmental crisis grew, fierce fighting broke out throughout the country and a week of almost total anarchy followed. On 23 May President Franjeh put into operation his promised strong measures to break the impasse by announcing that a new Cabinet had been formed under the Premiership of Brigadier Nur al-Din Rifai. Army officers filled the majority of the portfolios, with the highly partisan Christian Chief of Staff of the armed forces, General Iskander Ghanim serving as the Minister of Defence. It was not surprising that the NLP and al-Kata'ib were the only groups that welcomed the new 'military Cabinet'. The various Moslem groups, on the other hand, quickly buried their differences in a concerted effort to oppose the new Cabinet. The Leftist Druze Chieftain Jumblatt joined forces with the conservative Sunni leaders, Salam and Karami, in denouncing the presidential move. The three, accompanied by the Shii Imam Musa al-Sadr, attended a Moslem conference under the chairmanship of the Sunni Mufti Hasan Khalid in which they demanded the immediate resignation of the Rifai Cabinet. Similarly, the nationalist organisations, grouped under the National Movement, and implicitly backed by the

Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), pledged to take up arms against the 'military Cabinet' unless it was immediately dissolved. For the first time, a clear sectarian division became visible, whereby a societal dislocation on confessional basis would be distinctly possible. The conflict had thus acquired a much broader and more ominous character. It was at this juncture that the Syrian decision-makers perceived a threat to basic values and made their first incursion into Lebanon's civil war.

The Syrian decision-makers had, throughout the preceding month, refrained from making official statements supporting one or the other of the warring factions in Lebanon. The semi-official Syrian press, however, had repeatedly emphasised their country's support for the 'rights of the Palestinian people'.² The formation of the military Cabinet in Lebanon constituted the catalyst for a more vigorous Syrian response. In the first place, this new input polarised the situation to such an extent that the disintegration of Lebanon's social and political system became a real possibility. Secondly, the new Minister of Defence had frequently in the past exhibited his eagerness to involve the Lebanese armed forces in anti-Palestinian/Leftist operations. Thirdly, as the Palestinians' primary patron, the Syrian leaders would have been forced to intervene directly in any military confrontation between the Lebanese Army and the Palestinian Movement, an intervention which the Syrians neither wished nor contemplated at this stage.³ To the Syrians, therefore, the newly formed Lebanese military Cabinet was bound to escalate the conflict appreciably. On 24 May President Asad met with his Foreign Minister, Abd al-Halim Khaddam, the Air force and National Security Chief, Naji Jamil, and the Chief of Staff, Hikmat Shihabi, to discuss the new and ominous developments in Lebanon.⁴ A decision was promptly taken to despatch Khaddam and Jamil to Beirut to impress on the Lebanese President and the various political factions Syria's views on the subject (Decision One). The two Syrian emissaries arrived in the Lebanese capital on the same day to implement Syria's first major decision in the Lebanese civil war.

Syria's first intervention in Lebanese politics was highly successful. Three days after its formation, the military Cabinet tendered its resignation. Furthermore, the Syrian emissaries were able to induce the Lebanese President to ask Rashid Karami to form a government. Karami's appointment was particularly

satisfying to the Syrians because, while being Syria's erstwhile supporter in Lebanon and a strong sympathiser with the Palestinian cause, Karami also happened to be a strong political rival of Franjeh. There can be no doubt that the Lebanese President, who perceived Karami's appointment as a personal and political setback, would not have agreed to the appointment without explicit Syrian pressure.

The Palestinian leadership, on the other hand, considered the resignation of the military Cabinet and the appointment of Karami as a clear victory for their cause, and a move designed to ensure their survival and the continuation of their activities. In a message to President Asad at the end of May, the leader of the PLO Yasir Arafat confirmed the Palestinians' positive perceptions of the Syrian involvement.

The position taken up by Arab Syria and the persistent efforts of [Khaddam and Jamil] contributed to sparing the blood of the people, preserving Lebanese-Palestinian fraternity, and securing the safety and stability of dear Lebanon. Time has confirmed Syria's vanguard role under your wise leadership in the struggle to achieve the goals of our Arab nation and to defend its interests and support the Palestinian struggle until our land is liberated, and all our rights are regained.⁵

Karami's assumption of the premiership, however, in no way alleviated the political crisis. The National Movement continued to place a veto on members of al-Kata'ib joining the Cabinet, while the Kata'ib leadership naturally insisted that no government was possible without their active and full participation. The President blatantly refused to join with Karami in trying to arrive at a compromise formula which would facilitate the formation of the Cabinet. Indeed, there were indications that rather than help Franjeh was making efforts to obstruct Karami's mission.⁶ It soon became obvious that the appointment of the Prime Minister would not solve the political deadlock.

The deadlock at the political level soon had a spill-over effect into the social system. As the cabinet crisis persisted, with no indications of a quick resolution, fighting intensified on all fronts. The clashes, which at the end of May were confined to Beirut, spread to the south with the Christians of the NLP stronghold, Damour, involved in fierce fighting with the Shia Moslems of

Harat al-Naima. In the capital itself the battles concentrated on the port and the commerical district, and for the first time in the civil war rockets and heavy mortar fire began to pour indiscriminately on buildings and installations in an orgy of mass destruction.

A month after Karami's appointment Lebanon continued to be an anarchical society, torn between rival armed groups and lacking effective and authoritative governmental control. It was thus clear to the Syrians that as long as the cabinet crisis persisted the internal schisms would be maintained to the point that they might become almost intractable. While there was obvious concern over the deteriorating Lebanese situation, the Syrian decision-makers conceived of their role as being purely mediatory during this phase. They regarded the events in Lebanon as being domestically generated, and as such they believed that the conflict ought to be internally resolved, with Syria providing moral and material support. This perceptual pattern is evident from the following statement made by President Asad in an interview in mid-June, 1975:

I believe everyone knows our concern in Syria for Lebanon's safety and security. It is difficult to draw a line between Lebanon's security in its broadest sense and Syria's security. The problem has taken on a domestic colour . . . and just as such problems have been overcome in the past, efforts must be made to overcome this problem now.⁷

With this perception of Lebanese events, the decision-making committee of Asad, Khaddam, Jamil and Shihabi met on 28 June to discuss the worsening situation and decided to despatch Khaddam, who had recently returned from a visit to Washington, to Beirut once more to try and mediate between the local conflicting parties.

Khaddam's trip was again highly successful in its short-term requirements. He effected a remarkable reconciliation between the long standing antagonists Karami and Chamoun, and he was instrumental in excluding members of both the National Movement and al-Kata'ib from the proposed Cabinet. On 30 June, Prime Minister Rashid Karami was able to announce a six-member Cabinet in which he held the Defence portfolio, while Camille Chamoun, representing the interests of not only the NLP

but also al-Kata'ib, was put in charge of the Ministry of Interior. A delicate balance was thus created with Karami in control of the armed forces and Chamoun in charge of the security forces. With the formation of the six-man Cabinet, fighting quickly subsided throughout the country and a two-months period of relative tranquillity followed, thus increasing hopes for a permanent settlement. The warring parties, however, seemed to be scarcely in any mood for a real conciliation. Instead, they proceeded to establish training camps and to rearm themselves in preparation for the next round.

Phase Two: 1 September 1975–18 January 1976

The eruption occurred on 24 August 1975, in the Christian town of Zahle in the Beqa' valley when fighting broke out between the Christians and Moslem Shiis backed by some of the more militant Palestinian groups. Within two weeks the fighting had spread to the northern city of Tripoli whose mainly Moslem population became locked in fierce battles with the Maronite townsmen of nearby Zghorta involving heavy mortar and rocket fire. The fact that the President of the divided republic and its Prime Minister hailed from, and indeed had their power bases in, the two warring towns contributed to a perceptible increase in tension, and made effective and harmonious decision-making even more difficult. On 14 September a new input led to an ominous escalation of hostilities. The Army, under a new Maronite commander who supposedly was less partisan than the retiring General Ghanim, intervened on the side of the Christians, killing twelve members of a Tripoli Moslem political organisation called the 24 October Movement. This action immediately triggered a general eruption of violence throughout the country and particularly in Beirut. By 18 September many of the capital's buildings, shops and hotels had been totally destroyed by the heavy bombardment. It was at this point that the Syrian leaders decided to intervene.

Two major factors influenced the Syrian decision. In the first place, the sudden resumption of hostilities in Lebanon after eight weeks of relative normalcy and the rapid escalation of violence and destruction convinced the Syrian decision-makers that the time had come for a further Syrian intervention. This belief gained added impetus in the wake of the Lebanese Army's

intervention and the consequent mobilisation of the Palestinian and Moslem forces in the country. More crucially perhaps, the Syrian decision-makers perceived a direct link between the signing of the Sinai interim agreement between Egypt and Israel on 1 September 1975 and the sudden eruption of fighting in Lebanon eight days earlier. There is thus no doubt that the conclusion of the agreement brought in a new phase in the pre-crisis period.

Accordingly, the *ad hoc* decision-making committee of Asad, Khaddam, Jamil and Shihabi met on 18 September 1975 to evaluate the deteriorating situation in Lebanon. Wider consultations were sought by the decision-making committee, particularly with the two Party Commands and with the security apparatus. The consultations involved the Assistant Secretary-General of the Baath Party, Abdulla al-Ahmar, the Prime Minister and member of the National Command, Mahmoud al-Ayyoubi, the Assistant Secretary-General of the Regional Command, Muhammed Jaber Bajbouj, the Palestinian leader of al-Saiqa guerilla group and member of the National Command, Zuhair Mohsen, the other Palestinian member of the National Command, Samir al-Attari, the Chief of Security in the Air Force, Muhammed al-Kholi, whose security duties extended beyond his institutional connection with the Air Force to the entire Syrian region and to Syria's neighbouring countries particularly Lebanon, and the President's own brother and member of the National Command General Rifa'at al-Asad, who was also the Commander of the 'Defence Companies', Asad's famed praetorian guard.

The meeting on 18 September produced a consensus-based decision to despatch Khaddam and Shihabi to Beirut in an effort to effect an immediate cessation of the fighting and to induce a reconciliation among the warring political leaders. The following day, the two high-level Syrian emissaries arrived in Beirut to begin their peace mission. The party-based, semi-official newspaper *Al-Baath* explained the Syrian decision thus:

Lebanon's security, interests and Arabism are an essential part of Arab national security and interests, especially after the retrogressive Egyptian-Israeli agreement which is firmly linked with what is going on in Lebanon and with the requirements for implementing that agreement. This is the

reason for the Syrian initiative (the despatch of Khaddam and Shihabi to Lebanon). Every effort must be urgently devoted towards stopping the massacre in Lebanon for the sake of the Arab cause and the Arab nation.⁸

During their seven-day stay, the Syrian emissaries managed to effect a cease-fire and form the Committee for National Dialogue, in which the almost impossible occurred; Kamal Jumblatt, the Leftist leader of the National Movement and Pierre Jumayil, the chieftain of the Right-wing al-Kata'ib agreed to sit together on the new committee, along with a host of other Moslem and Christian leaders.

By this time, however, an almost complete attitudinal polarisation had occurred between the indigenous warring parties in Lebanon. It was not long, therefore, before the Committee was deadlocked. The Leftists insisted that the Committee's first priority was to draw up a plan for political reform, whereas the Rightists utterly refused to discuss reform plans while the fighting, allegedly perpetrated by 'alien' elements, continued.⁹ Predictably, therefore, the fragile cease-fire soon broke and fighting returned to all parts of the country with renewed ferocity. During the last week of October, heavy fighting in the downtown area of Beirut, involving rocket and mortar fire, was the worst the capital had seen since the beginning of the civil war.¹⁰ Abductions, murders and assassinations of mainly innocent individuals who had the misfortune of belonging to the wrong religious sect became rampant, and a general air of anarchy enveloped Beirut, soon spreading to the rest of the country.

The rapidly deteriorating situation in Lebanon had a spill-over effect on Syrian-Israeli relations, where tensions dramatically and ominously increased. In this, the United States played an important third-party mediatory role by trying to restrain each party from going beyond the limits acceptable to the other. They endeavoured to limit the Syrian response to the fighting in Lebanon by reminding the Syrian President, through a letter delivered to his political adviser, Dr Adib al-Dawoodi, by the American Ambassador, that 'Israel would consider the intervention of foreign armed forces [in Lebanon] a very big threat so that no matter what we (the United States) might say to it, it might intervene'.¹¹ At the same time, in response to statements made by some Israeli leaders, including Prime Minister Rabin,

regarding Israel's possible retaliation if Syria decided to intervene in Lebanon, the United States publicly warned Israel not to take any unilateral action.¹²

This action tended to diffuse the situation sufficiently for the Lebanese Prime Minister, Karami, seemingly the only remaining political personality in Lebanon that had the confidence of both the Right and the Left, to try one further gambit to stamp out the prevailing lawlessness. Yet another committee, the Higher Coordination Committee was formed on 8 November, with representatives of the Left, the Right, the Palestinians and the Lebanese security forces agreeing to serve on it. The Committee was to investigate all breaches of the official truce agreed upon by the conflictual parties and to stop these breaches by military force if necessary.

Immediately after the formation of the Committee the fighting discernibly subsided, and for a short while hopes were again raised that a possible peaceful settlement of the seven-months old civil war was at hand. But even if peace had finally arrived, it would have come to a country vastly different to the one existing before the initial April clashes. As one respected political analyst, who was resident in Beirut during this period of hostilities, vividly described the situation in the capital and in the rest of the country at the end of October:

The city, to begin with, had lost its unity as an urban complex. It now consisted of two separate and distinct residential sectors—a Christian sector to the east and a predominantly Muslim sector to the west—between which regular communication had become difficult, and in some respects hardly possible. Between the two residential sectors of the city stretched a no-man's-land consisting of the downtown area and its immediate peripheries—an area which was now abandoned to the armed men and snipers of the various warring factions. For the first time since the start of the civil war, the city made no haste to reopen despite repeated reassurances from the government, which were in many cases blatantly unrealistic . . . Like Beirut, the whole Lebanese Republic had been [left] with the lines of confessional division clearly marked. A considerable emigration of Christians from Muslim areas, and of Muslims from Christian areas had already taken place. . . . In theory, the Lebanese Republic as a political entity was still there,

wielding sovereign jurisdiction over a country whose territorial integrity was legally intact. All but legally, however, the country had fallen apart, and it needed a tremendous effort of will and imagination by all the sides concerned to put it together again.¹³

The Syrian authorities naturally perceived the evolving situation in Lebanon with increasing concern. The decision-making committee instituted a more frequent pattern of consultations with the two Party Commands and with the security apparatus. Particularly worrying to the Syrians was the possibility of Israeli involvement in the continuing Lebanese conflict which would drag Syria into a precipitant battle with Israel for which it was not prepared. Yet at the same time the Syrian decision-makers were beginning to realise that all their concerted diplomatic efforts and political pressures were not producing the desired results. This frustration was evident in a meeting President Asad had with Karami and Arafat in October, in which the Syrian leader, a usually calm and unemotional man, reportedly pounded the table and shouted at the Palestinian leader: 'If only you had had more sense in the past . . .'¹⁴ Nevertheless, the Syrians persisted with their policy of concentrating on the diplomatic instrument. Thus, President Asad, along with Foreign Minister Khaddam, met with French Foreign Minister Maurice Couve de Murville, after the latter's visit to Lebanon in the early part of December and discussed with the French emissary the latest developments in Lebanon, particularly Christian plans and attitudes. In the wake of this visit, arrangements were made for Pierre Jumayil to meet with the Syrian leadership in Damascus, in which the Christian al-Kata'ib leader was assured of Syria's opposition to any change in Lebanon's existing constitutional system. Moreover, prior to the Christmas festivities, Asad met Karami in Damascus to impress upon the hard-pressed Lebanese premier the necessity for utilising his links with the warring factions to maintain the delicate balance and avert the disintegration of the country, a prospect which, for the Syrian decision-makers, had by the end of December 1975 assumed a greater urgency. Even so, the Syrian leadership persisted in treating the situation in Lebanon at the close of the year as 'extremely worrying' but not 'desperate'.¹⁵

This perception began to change in the new year as the civil war

in Lebanon abruptly acquired a new dimension. On 4 January 1976, the two Palestinian refugee camps of Tel al-Za'atar and Jisr al-Basha, which were situated north of Beirut river in the heart of the Christian 'enclave', were besieged by Maronite forces. The siege was a practical manifestation of the increasing Christian demands to clear 'foreigners and alien elements from the homeland',¹⁶ except this time 'homeland' was becoming a synonym for the 'Christian Heartland'. There was no doubt that the operation signalled the beginning of a *de facto* division of the country. The siege of the two camps also marked, for the first time since the initial clashes of April 1975, the full and explicit entry of the PLO into the Lebanese conflict. On 12 January al-Kata'ib forces surrounded a third Palestinian camp, al-Dubbaya, and two days later triumphantly entered it. This victory opened the way for an attack on the Moslem slums of Karantina, al-Maslakh and al-Naba'a, which, like the Palestinian camps north of the River Beirut, fell within the perceived 'Christian Heartland'.

During the first two weeks of January 1976 the *ad hoc* decision-making committee met frequently to evaluate the rapidly changing situation in Lebanon. While the Moslem forces did respond to the Christian action by attacking the Christian villages of Damour, Mishraf and Jiyya which happened to be situated in the Moslem half of the country, it was the Christian offensive, with its long-term and strategic goal of effecting a *de facto* division of the country, that heightened the perception of threat among the Syrian decision-makers. It was at this time too that the Syrian leaders began to talk about the probability of military involvement. In an interview with the Kuwaiti paper *al-Rai al-'Amm*, Foreign Minister Khaddam warned that any 'move towards partition would mean our immediate intervention'.¹⁷ This general concern was suddenly and dramatically increased on 18 January when the Christian forces entered Karantina and Maslakh and proceeded to raze the two slums to the ground and expel the Moslem population. It was at this point that the perceived threat to basic values substantially increased and the perception of the probability of a military operation became acute. Moreover, for the first time since the beginning of the civil war there was a clear awareness of finite time on the part of the Syrian leaders for their response to the Lebanese situation. On 18 January 1976, therefore, the pre-crisis period ended and the crisis period began.

NOTES

1. See Bulloch, op. cit., p. 40.
2. See for example *al-Baath* (Damascus) 21 April 1975; *al-Thawra* (Damascus) 27 April 1975; *al-Baath* (Damascus) 28 April 1975; *Tashrin* (Damascus) 3 May 1976.
3. Iskander interview.
4. As noted in Chapter 4, these constituted an '*ad hoc* decision-making committee' with a responsibility for formulating and coordinating Syria's day-to-day responses to the evolving situation in Lebanon. These four were the primary decision-making group during the pre-crisis period.
5. *SWB*, ME/4917/A/2, 31 May 1975.
6. Salibi, op. cit., p. 110.
7. *SWB*, ME/4941/A/7, 28 June 1975.
8. *Al-Baath* (Damascus) 23 September 1975.
9. *Al-Amal* (Beirut) 4 October 1975.
10. Bulloch, op. cit., pp. 85–7.
11. This was revealed in a speech by President Asad in July 1976. See *SWB*, ME/5267/A/6, 23 July 1976.
12. *The Times* (London) 21 October 1975; *New York Times*, 30 October 1975.
13. Salibi, op. cit., pp. 136–40.
14. Bulloch, op. cit., p. 88.
15. Interviews with Iskander, Dawoodi, al-Khani, and Jweijati.
16. Bulloch, op. cit., p. 101.
17. *Al-Rai al-'Amm* (Kuwait) 7 January 1976.

Part Three

Crisis Period

18 January–30 September 1976

6 Decisions and Environment

Decisions

During the crisis period, seven major decisions were taken: three in the first phase (18 January–15 March 1976); three in the second phase (15 March–31 May 1976); and one in the third phase (1 June–30 September 1976). These decisions were:

Decision Four was a strategic decision taken on 18 January 1976, to deploy the Yarmouk Brigade of the Syrian-controlled Palestinian Liberation Army (PLA) to Lebanon in response to appeals by Leftist leaders, and to a perception of an impending *de facto* partition of the country.

Decision Five was taken on 19 January 1976. It led to the despatch of Foreign Minister Khaddam, Chief of Staff Shihabi and Air Force and National Security Chief Jamil to Lebanon to try and impose an effective cease-fire.

Decision Six was taken on 15 March 1976, when the Syrian decision-makers ordered the PLA and units of the Syrian-based al-Saiqa guerrilla group to halt the advance of two columns of the Lebanese Arab Army which were moving towards the presidential palace of Suleiman Franjeh.

Decision Seven was taken on 28 March 1976 in response to the perceived intransigence of the Leftist position in Lebanon, and particularly of their leader, Kamal Jumblatt. The Syrian decision-makers resolved to place an embargo on all arms supplies to the Leftists.

Decision Eight was taken on 8 April 1976, in the form of a limited military move to concentrate more troops in the region of al-Masna' with clear signals to the Leftists that they were prepared to use these forces to invade Lebanon if the Leftists' intransigence persisted.

Decision Nine was a strategic decision and was taken on 31 May 1976. It was decided that, having tried almost all the other options, only one alternative remained that could 'save Lebanon'. On 1 June Syrian troops poured into Lebanon in order to force a resolution of the conflict.

Decision Ten was a strategic decision taken on 22 September 1976, designed to end the political and military stalemate in Lebanon. It was decided to give the Palestinians five days to agree to withdraw peacefully from the Lebanese mountains. If compliance were not forthcoming at the end of this period, the military option would be used.

The Decision-Makers

In the crisis period, the decision-making committee of four members was expanded into an *ad hoc* 'decision-making Cabinet' consisting of nine members.¹ Not every decision during the crisis period was taken by the entire membership of this body. The size of the decision-making unit ranged from the maximum parameter of the nine-member *ad hoc* Cabinet to the minimum parameter of the four-member *ad hoc* decision-making committee of the pre-crisis period. The members of the decision-making Cabinet were:

Lieutenant General

Hafiz al-Asad: President of the Republic, Secretary-General of the Baath Party, Chairman of the Cabinet.

Abd al-Halim

Khaddam: Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Member of the Regional and National Commands of the Baath Party.

Major-General

Naji Jamil: Deputy Defence Minister, Chief of the Air Force, Head of National Security, Member of the National Command of the Baath Party.

Major-General

Hikmat Shihabi: Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces since August 1974. Until then, he was Director of Military Intelligence.

- Mahmoud al-Ayyoubi: Prime Minister until 1 August 1976, subsequently Secretary-General of the Progressive National Front, Member of the National Command of the Baath Party.
- Abdulla al-Ahmar: Assistant Secretary-General of the Baath Party.
- Muhammed Jaber Bajbouj: Assistant Secretary-General of the Regional Command of the Baath Party.
- Colonel Muhammed al-Kholi: Chief of Security in the Air Force, the President's special emissary to Lebanon.
- Zuhair Mohsen: Palestinian Member of the Baath Party's National Command, Leader of al-Saiqa guerrilla group.

Two relevant observations about the five new members of the expanded decision-making unit need to be noted. In the first place, the Party Commands seem to have assumed a more direct role in the decision-making process as the crisis intensified. Two of the new members, al-Ahmar and Bajbouj, were full-time party officials who had no other governmental or bureaucratic functions. Ayyoubi was also a high-ranking member of the Baath Party, who sat on the National Command and was until the April 1975 party elections a pivotal member of the Regional Command. It is significant that even after losing his post as Prime Minister in August 1976, Ayyoubi continued to be a member of the *ad hoc* decision-making Cabinet. The second relevant observation relates to the inclusion of Al-Kholi in the expanded decision-making unit. Thus, during the crisis period, two out of the nine decision-makers were air force generals in charge of national security. This was no coincidence. On the contrary, this points to a clear and positive correlation between heightened stress and increasing preoccupation with national and internal security. The affiliation of the two security personnel to the Air Force is also interesting, since the Air Force had constituted a crucial segment of the President's power base in Syria. The ninth member of the expanded decision-making unit, Zuhair Mohsen, owes his inclusion in all probability to his Palestinian origins and more

importantly to his leadership of al-Saiqa guerrilla group, which throughout the crisis period was actively involved in the fighting in Lebanon, often acting as an unofficial arm of Syrian policy.

The Psychological Environment

Although the decision-making unit was expanded to nine members during the crisis, the composition of the group and the ideological orientations of its members remained static. All nine decision-makers were long-standing adherents to Baathist ideological precepts. Of the five new members, al-Ahmar and Bajbouj were members of the Regional and National Commands, responsible for maintaining and safeguarding party orthodoxy; Ayyoubi and Mohsen sat on the National Command, and until the April 1975 party election, the former was an influential member of the Regional Command as well. Only Colonel al-Kholi of the new members of the decisional unit did not sit on either of the two party Commands. Although he also was a long-standing, card-carrying member of the Baath Party, it seems that he owed his inclusion in the *ad hoc* Cabinet to his affiliation with the national security apparatus. It could thus be argued that, as was the case in the pre-crisis period, the members of the decision-making group in the crisis period formulated their decisions within strict, universally accepted ideological parameters. Moreover, given the authoritarian characteristics of the one-party political system and the lack of any legitimised criteria for peaceful succession, the members of the *ad hoc* decision-making Cabinet showed a collective concern for political survival, which in turn minimised the possibility of disruptive and fissiporous inter-personal rivalries. Finally, the authoritative presence of the Chief Executive in itself acted as a unifying agent. According to a participant in the wider consultative process that took place during this period, President Asad

used to open meetings by acquainting the members with the details of recent developments. He would then make his own general comments and analysis, after which he would open the discussion. Depending on the ideas emerging from the discussion, a decision would be taken. However, this final decision was always the President's responsibility. In these meetings, the

President was the dominant personality, although he was flexible and prepared to alter his initial views.²

Thus, because of the ideological uniformity of the group, the unanimous concern of the group's members with elite perpetuation, and the unifying presence of the Chief Executive, the *ad hoc* decision-making Cabinet in the crisis period will be treated as a collectivity in the analysis of its members' attitudes and images.

Values and Attitudes

At the very basis of the Syrian interpretation of Lebanese events during the crisis period was a fundamental conviction that the civil war in Lebanon was a part of a much larger scheme formulated by the 'imperialist' and 'Zionist' forces in the global system which was aimed at undermining the capabilities of the Arab anti-Zionist movements and reversing the 'gains of the October war'. Thus according to a high-level official statement released in April 1976

The goals of this international conspiracy were the creation of a chain of events in order to produce a psychological and operational situation leading to an Arab capitulation to the Zionist enemy and the submission to its demands. It is in this context that the bloody events in the fraternal Lebanese region can be explained. It is furthermore clear that the conspiracy aimed to achieve the following:

1. Giving cover to the Sinai agreement.
2. Creation of a new 'event' in the region which will absorb the attention of the Arabs and divert it from the essential struggle between the Arab nation and the Zionist enemy.
3. Involving the Palestinian Resistance in an internal Lebanese quarrel of a confessional character in order to dissipate its energy and stop it from confronting the [Zionist] enemy.
4. Preoccupying the Syrian region with the Lebanese problem in order to undermine its capability to confront the conspiracies being hatched against the Arab nation.
5. Creating a potentially divisive situation in the fabric of

Lebanese society which would result in an actual partition of Lebanon into confessional statelets that would serve the Zionist aims of dividing the Arab nation, undermining the principles of Arab nationalism and making credible Israel's racist essence.³

There were other essential values that reinforced this seemingly deep-rooted Syrian belief in the 'conspiracy theory', and which motivated Syria's vigorous involvement in Lebanon during the crisis period. In the first place, the belief in the indivisibility of Syria and Lebanon continued to form a crucial segment of the psychological environment of the Syrian decision-makers. Thus, in a speech made in July 1976, President Asad insisted that 'Syria and Lebanon have through history constituted one country and one people, with so many genuine interests binding them in common. This must be well realised by all. The genuine common interests imply a genuine common security. . . . This [should] drive home a certain fact in reply to those who are yelling from over the borders: Why Syria?'⁴ This conviction naturally led to a further Syrian concern over the societal unity of Lebanon, which was reflected in the officially declared maxim that 'the goal of preserving national unity must take precedence over confessional quarrels and local political gains'.⁵ Given their belief in the indivisibility of the two neighbouring countries, the concern of the Syrian decision-makers over the internal unity and cohesion of Lebanon to some extent reflected their continuing fear of the disruptive spill-over effects into the Syrian situation of a possible Lebanese disintegration.

The Syrian leaders were also convinced that the infliction of a total military defeat by one of the Lebanese conflicting parties on the other would not serve the long-term prospects for peace in Lebanon. On the contrary, the Syrians firmly believed that the subjugation by force of one party to the will of the other would ultimately be detrimental not only to Lebanon's internal cohesion but also to stability in Syria itself and in the rest of the Arab world. Syrian diplomatic and military involvement during the entire crisis period was thus directed against 'those seeking a military solution to the problem'. To President Asad,

a military solution would first of all give rise to a new problem . . . which will preoccupy us and our area and the

entire world, a problem of a peculiar kind, the problem of people under repression. . . . The second outcome is that the world will endeavour to find a solution to the problem . . . and such a solution will never come about except through the partition of Lebanon, and this through violence and repression. . . . The third possible outcome of such a solution is that it may open the door wide to foreign interference, especially Israeli. We can easily imagine the tragedy which may face us if Israel should decide to interfere in order to save some Arabs from others. The fourth possible outcome consists of the many grave repercussions which a military solution like this may negatively bring to the Palestine cause, both within Palestinian ranks and at the international level, and which may also be detrimental to world opinion's support for the Palestine cause and Arab struggle. The fifth possible outcome of a military solution may consist of many negative repercussions within the Arab homeland, repercussions that may affect the Arab national conscience. We can imagine how ugly the image of Arab relations will be in the area and the havoc which Arab national interests and goals will be subjected to if such a solution is permitted.⁶

The final motivating impulse for the Syrian involvement in Lebanon during the crisis period was the growing concern of the Syrian decision-makers with the persisting confessional character of Lebanon's civil war, which could have sharpened religious awareness and polarised sectarian loyalties inside Syria. This was particularly true in the second phase of the crisis period when the Syrians shifted their allegiance to the Christian forces in Lebanon. Brandishing their secularist Baathist ideology, the Syrian leaders in an official government statement insisted that

. . . the Syrian Arab Republic rejects confessional fighting, and it rejects the killing of nationals because of their religious affiliations. This is not part of the manners, values or principles of the Arab people. Additionally [confessional killing] is contradictory with the spirit of love and forgiveness that characterises Islam and Christianity. Accordingly, the Syrian Arab Republic cannot in any way be a party to confessional conflict, but will steadfastly fight against it.⁷

Given the Syrian regime's avowedly secularist ideology, and the perennial concern of the Syrian leaders with possible sectarian eruptions inside Syria, a virulent antipathy against religious schisms characterised the attitudinal orientations of the Syrian decision-makers towards the Lebanese events during all the phases of the crisis period. Thus, for example, in his address to the nation on 12 April 1976, after the Syrian decision to blockade arms supplies to the Moslems in Lebanon, President Asad found it necessary to expound on the place of religion in politics:

Every man can recall that when we were students, we used to say: religion is for God and the homeland is for all . . . the Moslem and the Christian in this country both believe that the relationship between citizens is first and foremost the relationship of the homeland and Arabism . . . the Moslem in this country takes an interest in the Arab citizen in Lebanon whether he is Christian or Moslem . . . Christianity and Islam issued from our land. This is not a burden for us or a problem for us; it is a source of pride for all our masses. These values emerged from our countries and our land. . . . We must be a nation worthy of these values, worthy of Islam and Christianity.⁸

Syrian behaviour in Lebanon during the crisis period, therefore, was motivated by a number of value-based impulses: a conviction that the civil war was a function of a much larger 'imperialist' and 'Zionist' conspiracy; a belief in the past and future indivisibility of Syria and Lebanon; a deep-rooted concern over the societal unity of Lebanon; a total rejection of military solutions inflicted by one local party on the others; and an attitudinal antipathy against religious and sectarian conflicts. These motivations and concerns were the constituent elements of the attitudinal prism of the Syrian decision-makers during the crisis period.

Images

During the first and second phases of the crisis period (18 January–31 May 1976), the Syrian impressions of Soviet behaviour towards the Lebanese war were very favourable,

reflecting the close cooperation and intimate understanding which existed between the two sets of leaderships.⁹ More importantly, perhaps, was the clear coincidence of interests of the two countries with regard to the Lebanese conflict, which naturally contributed to the positive Syrian perception of the Soviet Union. The event that triggered the third phase of the crisis period (1 June – 30 September 1976), namely the Syrian military intervention against the Leftist alliance of Moslem and Palestinian forces, signalled a radical divergence in the interests of the hitherto close allies. The Soviet strong condemnation of Syria's intervention and its subsequent withholding of arms supplies contributed to the evolution of a negative Syrian perception of the Soviet Union. Especially resented was the letter despatched by Brezhnev in June 1976 in which he demanded immediate Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. The Syrian decision-makers felt that their long association with the Soviet leaders should have resulted in a more sympathetic Soviet perception of Syrian intentions and behaviour.¹⁰ Indeed, this negative perception persisted until Asad's visit to the Soviet Union in April 1977, when a change in Soviet behaviour, manifested in the decision to recommence arms supplies to Syria, brought about an improvement in Syrian images.

As far as the other superpower was concerned, the level of Syrian perceptual hostility towards American policies in the area decreased in the crisis period. This was primarily due to the active involvement of the United States throughout the crisis period as an emissary between Syria and Israel. Nevertheless, the bad-faith model, engrained deeply in the Syrian psyche as a result of years of Syrian-American hostility, continued to dominate the perceptions of the Syrian leaders. Thus, even the immediate official endorsement by the United States of Syria's military intervention in June 1976, which praised 'Syria for acting to protect some endangered Christian communities and for seeking to press all sides in Lebanon to observe a cease-fire',¹¹ was perceived by the Syrian leadership as 'part of the US scheme in the conflict. This (US endorsement) was publicly given at the same time that America was clandestinely fuelling the conflict.'¹² The case of Syrian perceptions of the United States is an excellent illustration of the resiliency of value-based images even when confronted with relevant environmental changes.

The United States had indeed been extremely supportive of

Syria's activities during this period. In April 1976, the Americans despatched Dean Brown to mediate between the conflicting parties and help achieve a cease-fire. Brown's mission occurred at a time when the Syrian-sponsored peace drive was on the verge of collapse. During this period, President Ford and the American Administration dropped their previous virulent opposition to outside involvement in Lebanon, because one had 'to look at the nature and intent of what Syria has been doing and the intent and nature of what they have done. Syria has been playing a constructive role.'¹³ Indeed, this support was predictable, given the growing coincidence of US-Syrian interests in Lebanon during the crisis period.

Syrian suspicion of American motives in the area, however, persisted, in spite of the support received by the Damascus regime from the United States Administration. These negative images related directly to the Syrian belief in 'imperialist and Zionist conspiracies' and to the identification of the United States as the 'traditional and long-standing supporter of Israel'. Perceptions, therefore, were bound to lag behind changes in the operational environment.

The only other global actor which would have been expected to take an active interest in the Lebanese conflict, but which in the circumstances, remained almost completely uninvolved, was the United Nations.¹⁴ This was due in the main to the Syrian preference for resolving the conflict locally. Thus, when Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim suggested at the end of March 1976 that the Lebanese situation should be discussed in the Security Council, he was immediately rebuked by Lebanon's Prime Minister Rashid Karami, Syria's foremost supporter in Lebanon, and by the Syrian leaders.¹⁵ As always, the Syrians perceived the Lebanese conflict as essentially a Syrian affair, and as such were vehemently against 'internationalising' it.

In the regional environment, the most crucial Syrian image was that of the Palestinians. During the first phase of the crisis period, the Syrian perceptions of the Palestinians and their Moslem allies in Lebanon were, as they had always been, extremely favourable. This was only natural given the special relationship that existed between the Syrian authorities and the Moslem/Palestinian alliance in Lebanon. Although the Arab countries consistently declared their support for the Palestinian cause, and some of them endeavoured to sponsor rival Palestinian groups, the feeling

persisted that Syria controlled the main body of the Palestinian Movement. In the enduring environment of inter-Arab competition for power and leadership, to be perceived as the Palestinians' main patron bestowed considerable prestige upon the relevant state, thus strengthening its position and the stature of its leader in the Arab world.¹⁶ However, Syrian efforts in Lebanon were aimed at securing a 'better deal' for the Moslems and Palestinians that would not radically disrupt the existing social and political structure of Lebanon. The eventual subjugation of one local party by the other was in no way acceptable to the Syrian regime. It was these considerations that motivated the Syrian-sponsored agreement of February 1976 which accorded the Moslems and Palestinians significant political and social gains yet kept undisturbed the delicate balance of Lebanon's political system. The antipathy with which the Moslems and Palestinians greeted the agreement adversely affected Syrian perceptions. To the Syrian decision-makers, this hostility stemmed from the Lebanese Leftists' desire to 'seek a military solution to the Lebanese conflict', which would result in 'the partition of Lebanon . . . through violence and repression'.¹⁷ Moreover, while the Syrian leadership would feel ideologically bound to help the PLO fight Israel, it would feel similarly committed to stop the PLO's efforts to 'liberate Junieh or Tripoli' in Lebanon.¹⁸ The Syrian decision-makers were virulently opposed to any interference by the Palestinians in the domestic affairs of a sovereign Arab state. The Syrian leaders

had in the past supplied the Palestinian Resistance in Lebanon with arms in order to safeguard it against blatant and unwarranted attacks by the Lebanese Army. After March 1976, however, when the Syrian authorities succeeded in extracting significant concessions from the Lebanese Christians, the situation became radically different. It was the Palestinians and the Leftists in Lebanon who were intransigent, intent on toppling the legitimate Lebanese government.¹⁹

Finally, the Syrian decision-makers were convinced that a complete Leftist take-over in Lebanon would invite an Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon,²⁰ thus increasing Syria's strategic vulnerability. These closely related perceptions contributed to a negative Syrian image of the Palestinians and their

Moslem allies which persisted throughout the second and third phases of the crisis period.

Extreme hostility towards Israel was a constant factor in the perceptions of the Syrian decision-makers throughout the crisis period. Even Israel's promised lack of response to Syria's military intervention in June 1976 was treated with considerable suspicion by the Syrian regime.²¹ This was due to the Syrians' fundamental belief in Arab nationalism and its logical derivative, Arab unity, and to their conviction in Israel's conspiratorial efforts to undermine Arab nationalism and stop Arab unity. At the very basis of this conviction lay the Syrian deep-rooted resentment of 'Israel's alien and cancerous presence in the midst of the Arab world'.²² This highly negative Syrian image of Israel was forcefully articulated by President Asad in a speech delivered in July 1976. To the Syrian President,

the problem in Lebanon concerns the Arab nation, so it is in consequence an internal Arab problem. Israel on the other hand—even if we accept that it is a state with an ancient history in the area, which is an incredible assumption—has no right to interfere in the internal affairs of the Arab nation. . . . The Arabs form one nation, and Israel is alien to it and has no business at all with what goes on in this nation. This is axiomatic and hardly stands in need of argument.²³

During this period, the Syrian leaders continued to attribute all Arab problems and setbacks to the Sinai interim agreement, signed in September 1975 between Egypt and Israel. The Syrians felt that the agreement increased the divisions within the Arab world and between the Arab states. More specifically, the Syrian decision-makers perceived a direct correlation between the signing of the agreement and the heightened levels of tension and violence in Lebanon during the crisis period. To President Asad, one of the 'imperialist aims' behind the Lebanese civil war was 'giving cover to the Sinai agreement'.²⁴ Similarly, to Foreign Minister Abd al-Halim Khaddam,

The events in fraternal Lebanon . . . come within the framework of the Sinai agreement to arabise the conflict and . . . create a major problem in a country which has a special relationship with the Syrian region, and prevent the

Palestinian Command from continuing the struggle and confronting the liquidationist plans.²⁵

These frequently articulated negative perceptions reflected the progressive deterioration in Syrian–Egyptian relations that began with the Sinai agreement and continued unabated throughout the crisis period.

Of the remaining Arab countries, Syrian perceptions of Jordan in the crisis period were as positive as they were in the pre-crisis period. To President Asad, the Jordanians were ‘close brothers who are the nearest kin to us’.²⁶ The cordiality was reciprocated by the Jordanians. Thus, on an official visit to Damascus in May 1976, King Hussein expressed ‘his full and absolute support for the Syrian initiative in Lebanon’.²⁷ Indeed, during the summer of 1976, when Arab and international protest against the Syrian intervention gathered momentum, only Jordan remained a consistent and faithful ally and supporter of Syria’s action in Lebanon. The Iraqis on the other hand were treated with hostility and contempt.²⁸ The rival Baathist regime in Baghdad was perceptually dismissed as non-rational, ‘having no faith in figures and careful calculations’.²⁹ During this period, there were no relevant elite perceptions of Saudi Arabia. This is significant in defining Syrian attitudes, as the Saudi decision to freeze the annual subsidy of the Syrian economy, signalling Riyadh’s disapproval of Syria’s activities in Lebanon, during the second and third phases of the crisis period did not produce articulated perceptions of hostility from the Syrian decision-makers. On the contrary, the Syrians endeavoured to keep intact their communication channels with the Saudi rulers, and as a result governmental and bureaucratic contacts were maintained throughout the crisis period.

The Syrian perceptions of the Arab League in the crisis period continued on the same pattern of the pre-crisis period. The Syrian leadership’s view of the regional organisation, one of whose primary aims was the resolution of inter-Arab conflict, was ambivalent to say the least. The lack of Syrian enthusiasm for the League’s efforts to pursue a conflict-resolution role in Lebanon related to the belief held by the Syrian decision-makers ‘that any expansion of its (the Lebanese conflict) scope whether on the Arab or international levels was in the interests of the conspiracy rather than conversely’.³⁰ The Syrians, therefore, continued to be

totally opposed to the involvement of other parties in an issue-area that fell within what the Syrians perceived to be their exclusive sphere of influence. The Syrian decision-makers deliberately sabotaged Arab League meetings by adamantly refusing to attend them or to participate in the discussions. This affected adversely the conflict-resolution capability of the League and the credibility of its meetings. These meetings tended to produce nebulous resolutions that had minimum operational value. It must be noted, however, that the Syrians were not so much worried by the League as by the possible interference of other Arab states through the League.

Finally, the Syrian leaders' perception of their domestic environment on the whole lacked the confidence exhibited during the pre-crisis period. The much greater Syrian involvement in Lebanon during the crisis period, and especially Syria's highly partisan military involvement, generated considerable anxiety and disquiet among the Syrian population. There were reports of increasing domestic turmoil during the months of May and June which included the arrest of some 300–400 people. Many of those arrested were reportedly party members and army personnel.³¹ Consequently, the Syrian decision-makers became overtly concerned with their mass support-base. Thus President Asad found it necessary to go to the 'masses' in July 1976 and deliver a long, four-hour speech, explaining Syrian policies and actions in Lebanon. The President's concern over his mass support was more than evident in the introductory part of the speech. In referring to the events in Lebanon, the President said,

Perhaps I should have raised this subject some time ago, but in putting this off, I was relying on the good comprehension of our citizens and their ability to interpret the events as they should . . . secondly, I was sure of the trust you placed in me; and thirdly I felt I would be expressing the dictates of every citizen's conscience in all the decisions I had to take *vis-à-vis* these events . . . the broadcasts and the rumours that continue to circulate here and there are well familiar to you as they are to me. If I had felt for one moment that the people's confidence in me was shaken, I would not have stayed a moment in power, you can trust.³²

Social discontent was naturally reinforced by Syria's consider-

able economic difficulties during the crisis period, which brought to a halt the remarkable boom of 1974 and 1975. An important factor in these difficulties was Saudi Arabia's decision to freeze its \$700 million annual subsidy of the Syrian economy and to stop financing investment projects totalling \$500 million. Indeed, the Syrian economy suffered much during 1976. Involvement in the Lebanese civil war cost an estimated \$1 million a day. The dispute with Iraq deprived Syria of \$3 a barrel of oil and of pipeline transit rights on Iraqi crude pumped to the Mediterranean across Syria. The boom years of 1974 and 1975 and the steep price rises in world commodity markets contributed to a 20–30 per cent inflation in 1976, which was exacerbated by an influx into Syria of more than 300,000 war refugees from Lebanon. Moreover, Soviet debt repayments amounted to \$328 million in the first six months of the year. The devastating effect of all these adverse factors on Syria's economy forced the Syrian authorities to cut the 1976 state budget from \$3.5 billion to \$2.0 billion.³³ The Syrian pound was correspondingly devalued by approximately 8 per cent. All this constituted a striking perceptual concern of the Syrian decision-makers, and was clearly manifested in President Asad's bitter remark: 'We did not go into Lebanon to achieve any regional ambitions, nor for any selfish or opportunist motives. On the contrary, it was at the expense of our economy and our daily bread.'³⁴

Only in their military capability did the Syrian leaders' perception remain positive. In describing the situation of stalemate in Lebanon that followed the Syrian military intervention in June 1976, President Asad in a major speech said: 'I say frankly, brothers, that there is no military problem in Lebanon. . . . If we intended to settle our accounts [with the Leftists in Lebanon] by military means, it would be an easy matter. If we wanted to settle accounts militarily, then the matter would have been settled long ago, but we did not follow that course.'³⁵ This indeed was no idle boast, and the Syrians were able to emphasise it operationally with their swift and massive victory over the Leftist forces in Lebanon between 28 and 30 September 1976.

NOTES

1. Interviews with Iskander, Dawoodi, al-Khani and Omran.

2. Iskander interview. These impressions were confirmed by Dawoodi.
3. *Al-Thawra* (Damascus) 1 April 1976.
4. Assad, op. cit., pp. 14–16.
5. *Al-Thawra* (Damascus) 1 April, 1976.
6. Assad, op. cit., pp. 45–8.
7. *Al-Thawra* (Damascus) 1 April 1976.
8. *SWB*, ME/5185/A/6–7, 14 April 1976.
9. Interviews with Iskander and Dawoodi, and with Mr Adnan Nashabi, Director-General of the East European Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who was interviewed on 4 January 1979.
10. See President Asad's interview in *Events* (London) 1 October 1976, p. 20.
11. *New York Times*, 2 June 1976.
12. Iskander interview.
13. *Guardian* (London) 20 April 1976.
14. France was also expected to play an active role in Lebanon, because of its old colonial links, and because the Lebanese Christian Maronites had always tended to look to the French for help and protection. However, because of limited capabilities, and a growing economic and political bond with other Arab countries, particularly Iraq, Algeria and Syria, who would not be favourably disposed to French intervention, the involvement of France proved to be extremely restricted. Indeed, it was confined to a curious statement by President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing made during an official visit to the United States in May 1976, in which he declared France's readiness to send 'several regiments' to Lebanon on 48-hours notice. This was predictably welcomed only by al-Kata'ib and nothing more was heard or done about it. See *New York Times*, 23 May 1976.
15. *Guardian* (London) 1 April 1976; *al-Baath* (Damascus), 30 March 1976; *al-Nahar* (Beirut) 3 April 1976.
16. Throughout the first phase of the crisis period, therefore, competing Arab states bitterly attacked the PLO for allegedly being a puppet of the Damascus regime. For example, President Sadat of Egypt declared in February 1976 that 'there is at present complete Syrian tutelage over the Palestine Liberation Organization. If this tutelage is not obvious to the Arab nation, then it is high time it is unmasked'. (*SWB*, ME/5126/A/2, 5 February, 1976).
17. Assad, op. cit., pp. 42–3.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
19. Al-Khani interview; identical views were presented by Iskander, al-Dawoodi and Omran.
20. *Events* (London) 1 October 1976, p. 20.
21. *Tashrin* (Damascus) 10 June 1976. There are strong indications, however, that Israel was quite genuine in its moderate attitude towards Syria's intervention in Lebanon, which related to the sudden convergence of interests between the hitherto conflicting states. Thus, on 6 June 1976, Prime Minister Rabin observed with obvious relish that more Palestinian 'terrorists were killed in Tripoli in four days than had been killed in Israel since the October war' (*Guardian*, 7 June 1976). It was quite understandable, therefore, that Israel was in no hurry to undermine Syria's military intervention in Lebanon. Moreover, the consequent dispersion of Syria's

- military power would considerably reduce Syria's capability to wage war against Israel. This was more than evident in the speed with which the United Nations mandate in the Golan was extended by the Damascus regime at the end of May 1976. The promptness of the extension was in stark contrast to the situation six months earlier, when a stronger and relatively uninvolved Syria delayed the renewal of the mandate long enough to successfully extract concessions from the United Nations which were clearly supportive of the Palestinian cause, thus undermining the Israeli position.
22. Al-Khani interview. Similar opinions were voiced by Iskander, Jinan, Omran, and Dawoodi.
 23. Assad, op. cit., pp. 75–6.
 24. Ibid., pp. 12–13.
 25. *SWB*, ME/5126/A/2, 5 February 1976. On the other hand, the Egyptians blamed the intensification of the Lebanese conflict on Syria for allegedly fomenting the situation for its own purposes. Referring to the civil war, President Sadat pointed out that it was Syria 'who had supplied the warring parties with arms, had rejected any Arab intervention in the crisis, and had urged the Palestinians into rejecting every attempt to bring a solution closer' (*SWB*, ME/5126/A/3, 11 May 1976).
 26. Assad, op. cit., p. 66.
 27. *SWB*, ME/5206/A/3, 11 May 1976.
 28. The antagonism between the rival Baathist regimes reached a climax with Syria's military intervention in June 1976. The intervention was described by the Iraqi press as 'fascist', 'imperialist' and 'serving American interests' (*al-Thawra* (Baghdad), 2 June 1976; *al-Jumhuriya* (Baghdad), 6 June 1976). Indeed, some of the most fierce fighting of this phase occurred between the Iraqi-backed Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and Arab Liberation Front (ALF) reinforced by hundreds of Iraqi 'volunteers' on the one hand, and the Syrian-dominated PLA and al-Saiqa on the other hand.
 29. *Events* (London), 3 December 1976, p. 20.
 30. Assad, op. cit., p. 21.
 31. *The Daily Telegraph* (London) 19 May 1976; *The Times* (London), 16 June 1976; *Guardian* (London) 21 July 1976. Similar arrests seem to have also occurred during the summer months before Syria's offensive against the Leftist forces during 28–30 September. See *The Times* (London) 19 September 1976; McLaurin, op. cit., pp. 245–6.
 32. Assad, op. cit., p. 10.
 33. *The Financial Times* (London) 13 October 1976.
 34. *Events* (London) 1 October 1976, p. 20.
 35. *SWB*, ME/5267/A/3, 23 July 1976.

7 Decision Process

Phase One: 18 January – 15 March 1976

On 4 January 1976, the Maronite forces besieged the two Palestinian camps of Tel al-Za'atar and Jisr al-Basha. The Christians' strategic goal was to eliminate the Palestinians' control of the main exits from East Beirut and of the main road to Matn. Two days later, representatives of the Leftist forces in the 'Higher Co-ordination Committee'¹ walked out of a meeting of the Committee in protest over the Christian action, and Yasir Arafat emphasised the determination of the 'Palestinian Revolution' to break the siege by force if necessary.² Not heeding Arafat's warning, the Maronites not only continued the siege of the two camps, but proceeded on 12 January to surround a third, the strategically placed camp of al-Dubbaya, which was duly overrun on 14 January. This opened the way for a Christian assault on the Moslem ghettos of Karantina, al-Maslakh and al-Naba's, which like the Palestinian camps, were situated in the predominantly Christian area north of Beirut River—the area which the Maronites were increasingly referring to as the 'Christian Homeland'. In retaliation the Moslem and Palestinian forces launched a massive assault on the Christian towns of al-Damour and al-Jiyya which were situated south of Beirut in the predominantly Moslem area of Lebanon. On 16 January, the Lebanese Chief of Staff, General Hanna Said, ordered the Air Force to bombard the supply lines of the Moslem forces attacking al-Damur. The following day, Moslem and Palestinian leaders in Lebanon, meeting at the house of the Sunni Mufti, decided to contact the Syrian authorities and ask for immediate help. They informed Syrian Foreign Minister Khaddam that the air strikes were carried against the express orders of the Lebanese Prime Minister, Rashid Karami, who was also the Defence Minister, and that the President, Suleiman Franjieh, had ignored all their pleas not to involve the Lebanese armed forces in the fighting.

They requested Khaddam to ask President Asad to put pressure on Franjieh in order to halt the ominous escalation in the conflict and the consequent perceived erosion of the Leftists' position. The Syrian President, however, refused to comply, preferring the Leftist leaders to take the initiative themselves and establish contact with the Lebanese President.³ Although the Syrians considered the intervention of the Lebanese Air Force in the civil war 'a serious precedent',⁴ Asad's passive response to the Leftist appeals was conditioned by the belief that the Palestinian 'Resistance and the parties on its side possessed more arms and ammunitions than the entire Army of Lebanon',⁵ a belief which was reinforced by the Leftist victories at al-Damour and al-Jiyya on 17 January.

The military situation, however, changed significantly on 18 January when the Christians succeeded in overrunning the slums of al-Karantina and al-Maslakh and proceeded to expel the Moslem populations. With their military situation deteriorating perceptibly, the Leftist leaders in Lebanon made further urgent appeals to the Syrians. This time President Asad responded to the appeals and contacted Franjieh telling him:

Mr. President, you have a grave massacre going on which will cause repercussions everywhere. I would like to ask you to do something urgent in order to stop it and avert its dangers. There are children, women and old people who are being assaulted, and this is very grave. Please lend your attention to this matter and do what you can while we await the results of your endeavour.⁶

The two Presidents finally agreed on a cease-fire to take effect that evening. However, reports emanating from Beirut indicated that the fighting was continuing and the situation worsening.

Fearful of an impending *de facto* division of the country and concerned over the plight of the Palestinian camps and the military situation of the Leftist forces in the wake of the fall of Karantina and al-Maslakh, the President realised that he and the Syrian leadership could no longer hope for a domestic solution to the Lebanese war. Given the rapidly deteriorating situation, and with a clear 'awareness of finite time' for the Syrian response, President Asad convened a meeting of the key members of the political leadership who, throughout the crisis period, acted as an

'*ad hoc* decision-making Cabinet'.⁷ This Cabinet participated directly in the formulation of consequential decisions during the crisis period, and in less important decisions, members of the *ad hoc* Cabinet constituted the immediate and central consultative unit. The *ad hoc* Cabinet consisted of Asad, Khaddam, Jamil, Shihabi, Ayyoubi, al-Ahmar, Bajbouj, al-Kholi, and Mohsen.⁸ In the meeting there was a clear consensus about Syria's duty to defend the Palestinian Resistance. However, it was obvious that this could no longer be achieved through the diplomatic instrument alone. A military intervention had become necessary, yet such action might lead to an Israeli retaliation. After a long discussion, it was decided 'to enter [Lebanon] under the title of the Palestine Liberation Army'⁹ [Decision Four]. This was a risky decision but by no means a reckless one, since the Syrians had made certain of communicating earlier the possibility of an intervention on their part to other relevant international actors, particularly the United States.¹⁰

As the troops of the Yarmouk Brigade of the PLA began to pour into Lebanon on 19 January, President Franjieh of Lebanon telephoned Asad requesting clarifications about the Syrian move and enquiring about Syrian intentions. Asad's reply was firm. He told the Maronite leader: 'Here in Syria we adopt a firm stand with respect to the Palestinians; there is a red line beyond which we will not permit anybody to go at all in as far as their well-being is concerned.'¹¹ The same sentiments were conveyed to the Leftist Lebanese and Palestinian leaders who on 19 January had arrived in Damascus to discuss with the Syrian President the evolving situation in Lebanon.¹² However, the Syrian leader also assured Franjieh and the Christians that the Syrians were firmly against the partition of Lebanon, and against the total victory of one side over the other in the local conflict.¹³ As a result of his conversations with Franjieh and the other Lebanese leaders, President Asad, along with the other three members of the decision-making committee, decided to despatch Khaddam, Jamil and Shihabi to Lebanon to supplement the military operation with diplomatic measures (Decision Five). The specified objectives of the mission were to effect an immediate cease-fire and to arrange for its supervision; to institute a political settlement and a national reconciliation; to form a government of national unity; and to implement the various Lebanese-Palestinian agreements.¹⁴

The three Syrian emissaries were in a commandingly strong bargaining position *vis-à-vis* the Lebanese President and the Christian leadership in Lebanon. The Syrian-dominated PLA troops had swiftly seized the strategically crucial crossroads at Chtoura from which forces could be quickly despatched to all parts of the country. Within forty-eight hours the invading forces had established control of the Beqa' valley, and had been able to send small policing units to Beirut and other towns. The Christians were conversely at their lowest ebb. As one commentator put it, in a few days the Rightists had 'lost their weapons, the army, the ability to set up a viable Maronite state, and the threat of Israeli intervention'.¹⁵ Within a day of its arrival in Lebanon, therefore, the high-powered Syrian delegation reached an agreement with the Lebanese authorities on the following points:

1. The formation of a Lebanese-Syrian-Palestinian supreme military committee whose task is to work out arrangements to end the fighting, to restore normal life and to supervise implementation.
2. The formation of a number of supervising sub-committees stemming from the supreme committee to observe and follow up implementation in the various areas and positions.
3. The supreme committee will fix a date for the cease-fire and declare the arrangements to end the fighting and the stages of its implementation.¹⁶

The supreme military committee was immediately formed. It was significant, however, that the two Palestinian representatives on the committee were the leader of al-Saiqa guerrilla group and member of the Baath Party's National Command Zuhair Mohsen and Colonel Saad al-Sayl of the Syrian-controlled PLA.¹⁷ It was clear that once having intervened the Syrians were determined to keep complete control of the evolving situation in Lebanon.

In the wake of the Syrian action there was a relatively long period of calm in Lebanon. The Syrian President arranged for the Lebanese Head of State to visit Damascus in order for a provisional agreement on constitutional reform to be worked out. President Asad made it clear to his Lebanese counterpart that in response to Christian concessions to the forces of the Left, the Syrians would try to ensure Palestinian compliance to the Cairo

It was clear that the document endeavoured to satisfy all the parties to the conflict by maintaining the confessional characteristics of the decision-making elite while promising wide-ranging reforms in Parliament, education and bureaucracy. The net result, however, was that the document was perceived with suspicion by all parties, particularly by the forces of the Left. Indeed, Syria's seeming neutrality in Lebanon was especially incomprehensible to the Moslem and Palestinian leaders who had always perceived Syria as their staunchest ally. Particularly frustrating was the Syrian aim to 'modify' rather than 'fundamentally change' the Lebanese political system. The Moslems were irked by the clause entrusting the Presidency to the Christian Maronites, thus legitimising the confessional system against which they had been fighting. The Palestinians were likewise agreement of 1969 which regulated Lebanese-Palestinian relations. Thus, on 14 February, the Lebanese President appeared on television to announce a new 'national covenant' designed to modify the existing political system in Lebanon. It affirmed the traditional practice in the allocation of the three highest offices of state, whereby the President of the Republic would be a Maronite, the President of the Chamber of Deputies a Shii Moslem and the Prime Minister a Sunni Moslem. It also contended that parliamentary seats should be divided equally between Moslems and Christians, and proportionately among the sects within each group. And while abolishing the confessional distribution of civil service offices and applying instead the principle of professional competence, it maintained the existing confessional parity in appointments of the first civil service category. The covenant, moreover, promised reforms in the country's social, educational, economic, judicial and administrative policies.¹⁸ With regard to Lebanese-Palestinian relations, the covenant affirmed the role of the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people in Lebanon, and that the Organisation was responsible for the affairs of the Palestinians in the camps. The covenant also promised that the Palestinian presence, including the Palestinian Resistance, would not be harmed or harrassed.¹⁹ However, all Palestinian camps around Beirut would be demilitarised and all heavy weapons would be removed; there would be no return to Karantina; and the restrictions on Palestinian activities in Lebanon embodied in the Cairo agreement and other successive agreements would be strictly adhered to.²⁰

resentful of the many restrictions contained in the provisions of the document regarding Palestinian military and political activities in Lebanon. And all this happened when, with the help of the PLA, the Leftists had succeeded in turning the tide of the war in their favour.

Not only did the covenant fail to satisfy the warring parties, but as a programme designed to foster national unity, it also came too late. By early February, the Army, the only remaining national body, began to disintegrate. The move was precipitated by Moslem Lieutenant Ahmad Khatib, who defected with his soldiers and established a breakaway army called the 'Lebanese Arab Army'. Very quickly, other predominantly Moslem barracks and garrisons mutinied and proclaimed their loyalty to the new army, while some Christian units, along with their equipment, proceeded to join the forces of the Right. In such circumstances, the national covenant had even a lesser chance of success, and it was the young Moslem lieutenant, as one of the leaders of the Left, who provided the final blow. In a public statement, Khatib condemned the covenant because 'it does not provide a fundamental solution to the Lebanese crisis, and the minor reforms it proposes are not commensurate with the sacrifice that has been made. In any case, the civil war is not over as neither side has achieved what it wanted.'²¹ Clearly, the momentum of the Syrian-sponsored peace initiative, carried through on the initial successes of the PLA intervention was beginning to falter seriously by the end of February.

A primary factor mitigating against the success of the Syrian mediation efforts was the failure of the Syrian team to induce the Lebanese leaders to form a government of national unity, which to the Syrians 'would represent a unifying symbol for the entire country'.²² This was probably due to the general disillusionment with the national covenant, felt particularly strongly by the Leftist leaders. It was the Moslem radical leaders, especially Kamal Jumblatt, who were most reluctant to join the proposed government of national unity. Indeed, during one of the many consultations undertaken by the Syrian emissaries, Jumblatt handed Khaddam a note in which he stated his utter rejection of the covenant.²³ Faced with these intransigent positions, the Syrian mediation team returned to Damascus on 26 February 1976, having clearly failed in their attempt to bolster the military intervention by effecting a national political reconciliation

through the creation of a national unity government under the premiership of Rashid Karami.

The departure of the Syrian mediators signalled the beginning of the end of the relative period of calm that followed the initial PLA intervention. On 3 March, the cease-fire started to break down with a series of gunfights, kidnapping and murders, and barricades immediately appeared in the Lebanese capital. On the following day 2,000 more Syrian-based Palestinian troops arrived in Lebanon to boost the PLA to an estimated 9,000 men.²⁴ The Syrians were obviously trying to rescue their initiative and to halt Lebanon's imminent slide into anarchy. On 5 March, Major-General Jamil arrived back unexpectedly in Beirut and conferred with Franjieh.²⁵ Three days later Khaddam joined Jamil in the Lebanese capital and both emissaries went directly to see Franjieh.²⁶ Karami also participated in the latter meeting and an initial agreement was reached on the constitution of a national unity government,²⁷ the immediate formation of which had become to the Syrians a matter of great urgency, given the rapidly deteriorating situation.

The major problem facing the Syrian mediators at this time, however, was not so much the inability of the Lebanese leaders to agree on common grounds for reconciliation, or even the worsening security situation; rather it was the process of army disintegration which had gathered pace dramatically during the first week of March. In that period, almost all of the remaining units in the Lebanese Army mutinied and joined their respective co-religionists. A number of garrisons in Southern Lebanon on the border with Israel were seized. Between 8 and 10 March no less than five garrisons, including the strategically important Rachaya and Tyre units, defected to the Lebanese Arab Army. By this time, the Lebanese Army, to all intents and purposes, had ceased to exist as a unified functioning entity. On 10 March General Hikmat Shihabi was despatched to Beirut by President Asad 'with definite instructions to try and stop the fragmentation of the Lebanese Army'.²⁸ During the next twenty-four hours, the three Syrian mediators, all of whom had by now returned to Beirut, feverishly endeavoured to rescue the situation. However, by 11 March, it had become clear to the Syrian team that

1. a tense environment had pervaded the armed forces, pointing to a possible military coup;

2. the Lebanese President and his advisers were unable to appreciate the nature of recent developments in Lebanon; and
3. a number of Lebanese politicians were intent on using the military to explore the situation and create a new crisis.²⁹

In the face of these perceived obstacles, the mediation team decided that their mission had ground to a halt, and accordingly they left for Damascus on 11 March.

Immediately on their departure, a number of senior Lebanese Army commanders, under the leadership of the Sunni officer Brigadier Aziz Ahdab, organised a 'television coup' in which they announced their intention to assume power, calling on President Franjeh to relinquish his post immediately. Although the leaders of the coup were 'not against the Syrian initiative which needed to continue in order to extricate the country from its ordeal',³⁰ nevertheless, the coup was not welcomed in Damascus. According to a later explanation by President Asad,

the coup did not serve to consolidate the cease-fire or the national reforms or the interests of the Palestinian Resistance. For only by consolidating the cease-fire would the Resistance have time to seriously engage the Israeli army. The military coup was an act of defiance, and it only served to trigger off the armed hostilities anew in Lebanon. The coup came and posed an issue that had not been posed before, namely the President's resignation.³¹

It was indeed in highlighting the issue of the President's resignation that the significance of the Ahdab coup lay. For while the coup itself was doomed to failure due to the seriously depleted forces under the command of Brigadier Ahdab, it nevertheless gave a new impetus to the anti-Franjeh forces in the country. On 13 March, two-thirds of the Lebanese Parliament signed a petition calling on the President to resign. Franjeh, however, categorically refused to comply with 'this unconstitutional move'.³² The President's negative response naturally angered the leaders of the Left and particularly the commanders of the Lebanese Arab Army who were intent on forcing the President to abide by Parliament's wishes. Accordingly, on 15 March, units of

the predominantly Moslem army proceeded to advance towards the presidential palace at Baabda.

To say that this action proved to be the turning point of the war is no exaggeration. There is no doubt that in the wake of the advance on the presidential palace, the whole character and direction of the Lebanese civil war took an abrupt and dramatic turn. President Asad needed to respond quickly and decisively to an action that was clearly contrary to Syrian wishes. The Syrian President was against forcing his Lebanese counterpart to resign 'at a time when only five months remained before the President's term of office was to expire'.³³ Furthermore, for the Syrians to allow a unilateral military action on this scale, undertaken without prior consultation with Damascus, would mean a significant erosion in Syria's position in Lebanon. If Franjeh had to go, it was up to the Syrians and nobody else to devise the appropriate method. Thus, immediately upon hearing the news of the attack on Franjeh's palace on 15 March, Asad convened a meeting of the decision-making committee consisting of himself, Khaddam, Jamil and Shihabi, and a decision was reached to halt the advance of the Lebanese Arab Army (Decision Six). Implementation was almost instantaneous. As the advancing columns of the Moslem army reached Sofar and Khalde, they found their paths blocked by units of the PLA and al-Saiqa. From this point onward, the war would provide the hitherto strange spectacle of the Left forces fighting against their old mentors and protectors the Syrian regime.

Phase Two: 15 March – 31 May 1976

Syria's dramatic change of allegiance was naturally an action that the Syrian leadership did not take lightly. Indeed, the situation in Lebanon was considered serious enough for Asad to cancel a projected official visit to France scheduled for 16 March. It was also at this time that the President began 'to devote at least 85 per cent of his time to the Lebanese conflict'.³⁴ Thus, on the same day that Syrian-sponsored forces turned against the forces of the Left in Lebanon, the Syrian leadership summoned to Damascus the Moslem and Palestinian leaders, including Yasir Arafat, Brigadier Aziz Ahdab, Rashid Karami, Zuhair Mohsen, Lieutenant Ahmad Khatib and Naif Hawatmeh of the People's

Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP). Kamal Jumblatt, in the first show of defiance, refused to go, and in an interview declared: 'The Syrians should pull out. Their role is finished. The question of government is now purely Lebanese.'³⁵ However, notwithstanding Jumblatt's objection, the meeting in Damascus reached agreement on a number of points which the Syrians took to the Lebanese President. Under obvious pressure, Franjeh reached agreement with Asad on the following:

1. Amendment of the Constitution or articles thereof to permit the election of a new President of the Republic six months before the expiration of the term of the President presently in office;
2. election of the new President;
3. movement toward resignation of the old President.³⁶

A brief Cabinet meeting in Beirut formally approved the provisions of the agreement. However, instead of defusing the situation, the Syrian plan only led to a general escalation in the fighting, particularly from the Jumblatt-led forces of the National Movement. This was particularly incomprehensible to the Syrians. As Asad was to declare later: 'The [Ahdab] coup had posed the issue of the President's resignation. Some of the national (Leftist) parties adopted this issue and requested us to exert an effort to this end. Yet when we did exert the effort required, and agreement was reached on a demand made by all of them, the situation exploded anew.'³⁷ However, by now, the Leftist forces had become almost completely alienated from Syria's policies in Lebanon, and Jumblatt was beginning to denounce publicly Syrian policies. Indeed, Jumblatt refused to meet Asad's two emissaries, Colonels Muhammed al-Kholi and Ali al-Madani, who were requesting his cooperation in their effort to arrange yet another cease-fire, because 'he was too busy directing the fighting.'³⁸ Responding to Jumblatt's growing anti-Syrian behaviour, al-Saiqa, the Syrian-controlled guerrilla group, issued a statement attacking Jumblatt and accusing the Druze leader of wanting 'to rekindle the fire of sedition and to sabotage the Syrian initiative. To fight Christians now when they are seeking peace will only drive them to seek outside intervention or partition, which we will not allow. If the escalation comes from Allayh (Jumblatt's mountain headquarters), then there is nothing

to prevent us from occupying Allayh.³⁹ It was true that at this juncture the Christian forces were in no mood to pursue the fighting, since they were losing on all fronts to the Moslem and Palestinian allies, and their enclave was shrinking daily. In a desperate broadcast, Pierre Jumayil, leader of al-Kata'ib, appealed to the Christians 'to unite for the homeland, [and] to perform the holy duty of defending the homeland which faces disintegration'.⁴⁰ Indeed, the military ascendancy of the Leftists constituted the crucial factor behind their reluctance to negotiate.

The Syrian leadership, however, was continuing its efforts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict, basing its activity in Lebanon on the belief that neither side should be allowed to score a total military victory over the other. To the Syrians, such an eventuality might terminate the civil war in the short-term, but it would not resolve the conflict. Indeed, the Syrians believed that if one party were to impose its will on the other, then Israel would almost certainly manipulate the resulting resentments of the subjugated community to the detriment of Lebanese unity and Syria's security interests. In the initial two weeks of the second phase, therefore, President Asad consulted regularly with Khaddam, Jamil and Shihabi, who over the previous two months had collectively constituted Syria's mediation mission in Lebanon. The general feeling at this time was 'that Syria should move against any person or organisation, regardless of their religion or ideological labels, who worked against Lebanese or Syrian interests'.⁴¹ And since it was Jumblatt who had been frustrating Syria's efforts to break the impasse, the Syrian leadership endeavoured once again to make contact with the Druze leader. This time they were successful, and on 28 March Jumblatt arrived in Damascus and had a day-long meeting with the Syrian President. Given the two men's political and attitudinal polarisation, however, the meeting predictably ended in deadlock. Jumblatt quickly returned to Allayh, and from there issued a particularly offensive statement thanking the Syrian President for his lunch and hoping to return the invitation soon in Bikfaya—the home town of Jumayil.⁴² A detailed account of the meeting, which has not been seriously challenged, was later narrated by President Asad in an important speech. The Syrian leader explained that he told Jumblatt:

We agree with you in the analysis of the events in Lebanon, and

we have worked all of us in order to put a stop to the fighting. We have helped you politically and militarily, but you have not been able to hold out, so we entered Lebanon risking the possibility of a war with Israel, and we helped to provide the Resistance with all the guarantees it wanted so that it could operate freely, and we also discussed your national reforms and succeeded to get that Constitutional Document endorsed which incorporated a great deal of what you had demanded, some 90 or 95 per cent. Then came the coup to raise a new issue, that of the President's resignation, which had not been raised before and which we did not approve. You backed the coup and the demand put forward by it that the President should resign. We made the necessary contacts and as a result of our efforts an agreement was reached on this matter. No sooner had the agreement been reached than the situation was exploded once again by you. Up to the present, we are satisfied with all we have done. . . . We had thought we both were moving along the same line and towards the same target. After what happened, we wish you now to tell us exactly what you want. The Resistance and its rights and guarantees are no longer a problem. The national reforms are no longer a problem inasmuch as Lebanon's special circumstances permit. The President's resignation is no longer a problem; so what else do you want? . . . Here are examples of what he said: 'We had agreed on six points', he said, 'but as it turned out the Constitutional Document contained seventeen points'. I told him in brief that it was not important how many items it contained, six or seventeen; the important thing was what these items contained. Was there anything in these items, I asked him, which did not run in harmony with what you demanded, or did you demand things that were ignored in the Document? . . . He said they appointed a committee to study the Document and found that it was vague. I reminded him that the Document consisted of broad lines for future work and that every item in it required decisions, decrees and laws in order to specify and define everything with all the detail and precision that was needed. . . . He raised the subject of secularisation, insisting they wanted a secular state in Lebanon. I told him the Phalangists (al-Kata'ib) were no less enthusiastic about secularisation. . . . It was the Moslems in Lebanon who did not want a secular state, not conversely, for the question

concerns the essence of Islam. . . . I told him that Moslem religious men and scholars were the ones who did not approve a secular state. You must not heed them, he said, because they represented no one. I told him it was not a question of representation . . . but of something connected with the religion of Islam, and any question connected with the Moslem religion must not be taken lightly. This is what I told Jumblatt in that meeting. Let us chastise them, came his reply, the issue will have to be resolved militarily, and high time too, for they have ruled us all these 140 years.⁴³

To President Asad and the rest of the Syrian leadership, therefore, the situation in Lebanon as articulated by Jumblatt was 'not a question of right or left, as we have been told, nor of progressive or reactionary, or Moslem against Christian, but a question of vengeance, a 140-year old vendatta'.⁴⁴ The Syrian leaders thus became convinced that Kamal Jumblatt and the forces of the Left in Lebanon were no longer interested in reconciliation but were seeking a military solution to the Lebanese impasse. To Asad

. . . such a solution will never come about except through the partition of Lebanon, and this through violence and repression. There will be a state created for those repressed people in which the predominant feeling will be one of bitter resentment. One generation after another will feel the same in view of the injustice that has been inflicted upon them. They will lose all faith in Arab values. They will lose faith in Islam. . . . The State which will thus be created will very frankly be more dangerous and more hostile to the Arabs than Israel itself, not because the people in it are Israeli or alien, no, not because of this, for they are not: they are of us; it is only because of the way they will feel after the series of injustices and repressions they have been through.⁴⁵

On the evening of 28 March, almost immediately after Jumblatt's hurried departure from Damascus, Asad met with Khaddam, Jamil and Shihabi and a decision was quickly reached to sever all arms supplies to the Leftist alliance in Lebanon (Decision Seven).

The effects of this decision in Lebanon were immediate. On 30 March Jumblatt confirmed that Syria had held up \$12 million

arms shipment which included heavy weapons and much needed ammunition.⁴⁶ The sudden severance of arms supplies was an important factor in the Leftists' acceptance of a ten-day truce designed to facilitate a meeting of Parliament so that the Constitution could be amended according to the dictates of the Asad–Franjieh agreement. However, by now, Jumblatt's alienation from the policies pursued by President Asad had increased to such an extent that on 31 March, three days after the arms supplies dried up, the Leftist Druze leader was moved to declare:

There was a mistake in bringing the Syrian army into Lebanon. . . . The intervention of the Syrian army in this manner and without permission of the ruling authority, represented in the government, could have led to a counter intervention by Israel. . . . Just as we welcomed the Syrian initiative at the beginning of the intervention, we welcome the Egyptian initiative (at mediation) in view of the traditional friendship which links the Lebanese and Egyptian peoples.⁴⁷

Given the extreme hostility pervading Syrian–Egyptian relations as a result of the Sinai interim agreement, Jumblatt's pointed reference to a possible Egyptian intervention served to heighten Syrian anxieties. Indeed, their alarm was evident from the promptness with which Rashid Karami, the Lebanese Prime Minister and Syria's foremost ally in Lebanon, responded to Jumblatt. Karami rebuked the Druze leader for attacking 'sisterly Syria' and urged 'all Arabs to place all their weight behind Syria in achieving this humanitarian and national objective' (the unity and security of Lebanon).⁴⁸ In Damascus, the Syrians became convinced that Jumblatt was set on a collision course with Syria and that he was prepared to sabotage Syria's efforts to bring the Lebanese conflict to a successful resolution.⁴⁹ Not prepared to take any chances with Syria's prestige in Lebanon, and intent on dissuading Jumblatt and the forces of the Left from sabotaging the parliamentary meeting scheduled to meet on 9 April to approve the Asad–Franjieh accord in mid-March, President Asad, in consultation with Khaddam, Jamil and Shihabi, ordered on 8 April the concentration of more Syrian troops in the region of al-Masna' on the border with Lebanon (Decision Eight). The following day, the President's decision was fully implemented with Syrian troops poised on the border with Lebanon in a high

state of readiness, and with some forty tanks entering Lebanon but remaining essentially near the Syrian border and out of the conflict.⁵⁰ This Syrian action allowed the Lebanese Parliament to meet and unanimously pass a law allowing for the immediate election of a new President. Three days later, in a major speech, President Asad emphasised Syria's new posture when he bluntly declared: 'We are ready to move into Lebanon to stand against any aggressor, irrespective of his religious pretensions.'⁵¹ However, in reality, the President's freedom of manoeuvrability was more constrained than he would have liked to admit. The day following Asad's statement, the United States Ambassador in Damascus delivered a message to the Syrian leadership, which contained an explicit Israeli warning against further Syrian activities in Lebanon. The message read:

The Israeli Government informed us that it considered that Syrian actions in Lebanon had reached a point at which Israel would find itself compelled to take its own measures if this point was transcended. This was very clear. We in the United States are concerned that Syria might get the impression that the absence of an open Israeli reaction means lack of Israeli concern regarding the Syrian actions, contrary to what we have continuously communicated to Damascus during the past weeks.⁵²

Nevertheless, Syrian attitudes had, by mid-April, toughened considerably, and Syrian policy in Lebanon had totally departed from its traditional support of the Leftist/Moslem forces. It was Kamal Jumblatt and the National Movement who had become in Syrian perceptions the real perpetrators of the civil conflict. For the first time since the eruption of hostilities a year earlier, a consequential coincidence of interests between the Syrians and the Lebanese Christians began to take shape. Thus, President Franjieh sent Asad a telegram on 14 April expressing 'profound gratitude on behalf of the Lebanese people for the noble, brotherly sympathy you have shown towards all Lebanese, motivated by your sincere Arab zeal for the unity, independence and prosperity of Lebanon and your great interest in the cessation of fighting and destruction'.⁵³ Even Camille Chamoun, who three months earlier had vigorously objected to Syrian mediation,⁵⁴

now insisted that 'co-operation with fraternal Syria is necessary at all times, and especially in the present circumstances'.⁵⁵

In this emerging configuration of forces, the Syrians continued to distinguish between the Palestinians and the Leftist forces of Kamal Jumblatt. The Syrians persisted in regarding themselves as the 'guardians of the Palestinian Revolution',⁵⁶ and as such expected the leaders of the Palestinian organisations to perceive correctly Syrian goals and intentions in Lebanon. Thus with the rapid deterioration of their relations with Jumblatt and the National Movement, the Syrian leaders endeavoured to emphasise and bolster their position *vis-à-vis* the Palestinians in an effort to isolate the Leftists in Lebanon. The Palestinian leaders were, therefore, summoned to Damascus on 15 April to attend a high-level meeting with the Syrian decision-makers. On the Palestinian side, the meeting was attended by Yasir Arafat, Salah Khalaf, Farouq Kaddoumi, Abu Salih, who were all members of the PLO Executive Committee, and by Zuhair Mohsen, leader of al-Saiqa, and Naif Hawatmeh, leader of PDFLP. The Syrian side was represented by the *ad hoc* decision-making committee of Asad, Khaddam, Jamil and Shihabi. The meeting continued through the night, and agreement was reached at 4 a.m. on 16 April. That morning, the following announcement was made simultaneously on Radio Damascus and on 'Voice of Palestine':

The situation in the area was discussed in general and that in Lebanon in particular. Aspects of the crisis in Lebanon and the dangers in its continuation were assessed and analysed. There was agreement between everyone regarding the various matters. The two sides restated their concern for the fraternal Lebanese people and for their security, the safety of their land, and their stability. Agreement was reached on the following points:

1. To stop the fighting and adopt a unified position against any quarter which resumes combat operations.
2. To form once again the tripartite Syrian-Palestinian-Lebanese supreme military committee to achieve, implement and supervise a cease-fire until the election of a new President of the Republic, who will decide on the security measures he deems necessary in accordance with his constitutional powers.

3. To combat all forms of partition and any action or measure which might harm the unity of the Lebanese people and land.
4. To reject the Arabization of the crisis in Lebanon, and especially anything that would lead to the despatching of Arab forces.
5. To reject US solutions and plans in Lebanon.
6. To cling to the continuity of the Syrian initiative.
7. To reject internationalisation or the entry of any international force in Lebanon.⁵⁷

There was no doubt that the agreement exhibited the predominance of the Syrian position..Almost all the Syrian demands were accepted by the Palestinian leaders. The Syrian natural satisfaction with the agreement, however, was short-lived. As soon as Arafat and his Palestinian colleagues arrived back in Beirut, a meeting of the National Movement under Kamal Jumblatt was held to discuss the agreement, and a statement issued at the conclusion of the meeting on 17 April was very sceptical of most of the agreement's provisions.⁵⁸ It was obvious that Arafat had by now linked the fate of the Palestinian Resistance so closely with the Lebanese Leftist parties that his ability to take independent decisions had become severely constrained. In the wake of the Jumblatt announcement, there was general expectation that renewed fighting would soon erupt.

In fact, the truce not only held but was extended by the warring parties to the end of April to allow for the election of a new President. A more potent reason for the truce extension perhaps was the increasing difficulties the Leftists were encountering in their efforts to procure arms. Not only did the Syrians terminate their own military aid to their old allies, but they also blockaded the port of Sidon, thus preventing vessels carrying privately purchased arms shipments from reaching the Leftists. Whatever the reasons, the temporary lull allowed for preparations for the presidential elections to proceed unhindered. Jumblatt, however, effected yet another reversal of position over the election. On 24 April the Leftist leader threatened to resume the military offensive if a new President were not elected by 2 May. When the Syrians succeeded in arranging this, the Druze leader attacked the Syrian initiative and called the elections too precipitant.⁵⁹ Jumblatt was trying to gain time in an effort to increase support

for his candidate in the presidential elections, Raymond Edde, who, although a Maronite, had been a frequent and outspoken critic of the Christian political establishment. At the end of April, however, it was clear that the other candidate, the Syrian-backed Ilyas Sarkis was the favourite to win the necessary majority of the parliamentary vote. Bowing to Leftists' demands, the Speaker of Parliament postponed the elections for one week to 8 May, but even this did not satisfy Jumblatt. On the eve of the elections, the leader of the National Movement defiantly called on the Lebanese people to

declare a general strike and use all kinds of methods to manifest the popular protest against the attempts to appoint a President by force. . . . Foiling attempts to appoint a President by force will open the way for a political dialogue and a Lebanese settlement—between the Lebanese themselves.⁶⁰

Although twenty-nine deputies heeded Jumblatt's call and boycotted the parliamentary elections, Sarkis was duly elected by sixty-six out of a possible ninety-nine votes. Immediately following the election of Sarkis, the disgruntled Leftists increased hostilities and fighting spread on all fronts. By this time the Syrians were beginning to talk publicly about the possibility of a military intervention against Kamal Jumblatt and his followers. During the first week of May, Khaddam unequivocally declared:

Syria will not hesitate to send military forces to Lebanon to foil the partitioning conspirators. . . . When I stated in the past that Syria would occupy part of Lebanon and annexe it, including Jabal Lubnan (Mount Lebanon), I meant the occupation of Alayh and the surrounding area to paralyse Kamal Jumblatt's movement and prevent the partitioning of Lebanon.⁶¹

In Lebanon, fighting had engulfed the entire country in the wake of the Sarkis election, and in the mountains Palestinian forces including al-Fatah were locked in bitter battles with the Christians. The crisis between Syria and the mainstream Palestinians escalated appreciably when units of the Syrian-controlled al-Saiqa and PLA overran a number of strongholds in Tripoli manned by members of the PFLP and PDFLP.⁶² The

escalating crisis induced the Libyans to offer their mediation, and Prime Minister Abd al-Salam Jalloud arrived in Damascus on 15 May and met with the Syrian leadership. He then left for Beirut and held meetings with the Sunni Mufti, Palestinian leaders and other Moslem leaders. On 18 May he met Jumblatt and by all reports was extremely antagonised by Jumblatt's seeming intransigence, his determination to pursue the military option, and his hostility towards Asad.⁶³ On his arrival back in Damascus, he made a statement accusing Jumblatt of 'conspiring with Israel and the United States against the independence and unity of Lebanon as well as against the Arab world'. He praised the 'peace initiative of President Asad in Lebanon and expressed Libya's full support for Syria's efforts'.⁶⁴ The failure of Jalloud's mission only served to reinforce the increasing Syrian conviction that a military intervention was the only remaining option. According to an authoritative account:

By beginning of May, it had become obvious that only a military intervention would save Lebanon from disintegration, and naturally it was incumbent upon Syria to carry out such an operation because of its ideological commitment to, and strategic interest in, Lebanon. The Syrian authorities, therefore, embarked upon a concerted diplomatic offensive to inform other states of Syria's intentions and goals in Lebanon, namely to save Lebanon and preserve its unity.⁶⁵

Indeed, during the second half of May, President Asad received the Foreign Ministers of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and Tunisia, in addition to a large number of Lebanese leaders.⁶⁶ Even more importantly, the United States Ambassador was 'kept informed of Syria's intention to impress upon the Americans that any Syrian intervention was not aimed at Israel, but was meant to save Lebanon'.⁶⁷ The Syrians were thus trying to minimise the element of risk in any future military intervention.

By the end of May, therefore, the political, and more crucially, the perceptual and attitudinal positions of Asad and the Syrian leadership on the one hand, and the leaders of the Lebanese Moslems and the Palestinian Movement on the other, had become completely and seemingly irrevocably polarised. Clashes between the Syrian-backed Palestinians and other Palestinian

groups grew more frequent, and in an open challenge to Damascus, Arafat castigated al-Saiqa and the PLA for fighting 'their fellow countrymen', reminding them that 'they should be striking into Palestine from the Golan'.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, fighting grew in intensity, assassinations and executions proliferated, shelling and rocket fire became increasingly indiscriminate, and in a particularly bad three-day period in Beirut over five hundred people were killed.⁶⁹

As Lebanon seemed to slide into total and uncontrollable anarchy, and as the Leftist and Palestinian forces were openly challenging Syria not only in their public statements, but also in scoring notable victories over the Syrian-backed units in Lebanon, President Asad's domestic position began to be undermined. There were consistent reports of domestic disquiet in the second half of May, which included the reported arrest of some 300–400 people.⁷⁰ The postponement of the Saudi annual subsidy disrupted the Syrian economy, and the Sunni population was becoming increasingly restive. The Syrian leadership needed to act quickly and decisively.

During the last week of May, a series of meetings with the leaderships of the Regional and National Commands of the Baath Party and with the Central Command of the Progressive National Front were undertaken by President Asad. Only the Communist Party, whose leaders were against Asad's anti-Left policies in Lebanon, were excluded from the consultative process. These meetings discussed the situation in Lebanon and the possible policy options available to the Syrian decision-makers. The discussions were long, exhaustive and, in some cases, stormy, containing sharp disagreements, especially over the possible deployment of the armed forces. Nevertheless, at the end of this wide-ranging consultative process, the President was given 'full authority to reach the proper decision'.⁷¹ Thus on 31 May 1976, the *ad hoc* decision-making Cabinet of Asad, Khaddam, Jamil, Shihabi, Ayyoubi, al-Ahmar, Bajbouj, al-Kholi and Mohsen met and resolved to commit the Syrian armed forces to Lebanon (Decision Nine).

Phase Three: 1 June–30 September, 1976

On 1 June 1976, Syrian troops, numbering about 4,000 reinforced

by 250 tanks, moved into Lebanon. These were crack units of the 3rd Armoured Division which was usually held in reserve for possible combat with Israeli forces in the Golan Heights. The troops quickly moved through the Beqa' Valley taking over control of the important crossroads at Chtoura. With the Palestinian forces quickly retreating, and the Kata'ib militia quietly abandoning their positions to the advancing Syrian forces, the initial phase of the invasion was low-key and highly successful. However, the advance of the Syrians was decisively halted in Bhamdoun and Sidon. Particularly serious was the Syrian reverse in Sidon. Attacking in two thrusts, the Syrians reached the centre of the town only to fall into a carefully prepared Palestinian ambush. Two tanks were knocked out, four were captured with their crews, and the rest beat a hasty retreat regrouping outside the town.

The Syrians' problems were not confined to the battlefield in Lebanon. Apart from Jordan, the response of the Arab countries to Syria's military intervention was far from being enthusiastic. The Saudi press comments reflected the rulers' disapproval of the Syrian venture,⁷³ and the Iraqis bitterly attacked the 'fascist ruling clique in Damascus for this hideous crime against the Arab people of Palestine'.⁷⁴ Moreover, in a blaze of publicity, the Iraqi leadership despatched troops to the Syrian-Iraqi border 'to execute their historic duty'.⁷⁵ Egypt promptly withdrew its diplomatic mission from Damascus and asked the Syrians to close their embassy in Cairo.

Internationally too, Syria's diplomatic position became weaker. While the United States gave the Syrian intervention its approval, the Soviet Union, Syria's main patron and foremost supplier of arms, responded to Syria's offensive against the Leftist forces in Lebanon with extreme hostility. A week after the Syrian entry into Lebanon, *Tass* issued a statement calling for an end to foreign intervention and demanding an immediate cease-fire. The official Soviet agency reminded the Syrians that they had repeatedly claimed that their intervention was aimed at stopping the bloodshed. However, 'notice should be called to the fact that bloodshed continued in Lebanon today and blood flows in even greater streams'.⁷⁶ Soviet displeasure at the Syrian action was such that Brezhnev was moved to despatch two letters to President Asad, in one of which the Soviet leader declared:

The Soviet Union feels disquiet over the position taken by Syria. . . . we insist that the Syrian leadership should take all possible measures to end its military operations against the [Palestinian] Resistance and the Lebanese National Movement. There must be an immediate cease-fire in Lebanon. You can contribute to this by withdrawing your troops from the Lebanon. . . . we are convinced that such moves correspond with Syria's own interests. . . . [because otherwise] the imperialists and their collaborators will be able to bring the Arab people and the area's progressive movements under their control.⁷⁷

Indeed, according to a CIA report, Soviet military aid to Syria 'dwindled to a trickle'⁷⁸ as an expression of Soviet displeasure. This report was confirmed by the Minister Councillor of the Syrian embassy in Moscow, Mr Amil Shawari, who in an interview said that President Asad's visit to the Soviet Union in April 1977 was undertaken in order 'to re-establish normal military and economic supplies after delays caused by disagreements over the Lebanese war'.⁷⁹

As a result of this international pressure on the Syrian leadership and the slow progress of the Syrian Army in Lebanon, the invasion was indecisive. Total victory was by no means achieved, the Leftist alliance was not subjugated to the Syrian will, Lebanon continued to be divided, and political authority remained non-existent. On 9 June, Asad convened a joint meeting of the Party Commands and the Central Command of the Progressive National Front to acquaint them with developments in Lebanon. There is no doubt that the main concern of the meeting related to the Syrian domestic situation in view of the military stalemate in Lebanon. This concern was evident in the statement issued at the end of the all-night gathering. The Syrian political leadership called

on the masses and peoples of the Syrian region for increased caution and increased vigilance to confront the imperialist designs and defeat them. . . . Strengthening national unity [was] imperative if Syria [was] to stop the war in Lebanon, safeguard Lebanon's unity, and emphasise Lebanon's Arab character. . . . [Syrians] must all stand behind the heroic Syrian army which has always been the shield of the Arab

nation in its struggle against all conspiracies, irrespective of their source.⁸⁰

While the stalemate in Lebanon continued, the Syrians proceeded to help the Christians actively in their efforts to regain military preponderance over the forces of the Left. Aided by Syria's blockade of the arms destined for the Left alliance, the Christian forces went on the offensive by attacking the three remaining non-Christian enclaves in their heartland, the two Palestinian camps of Tel al-Za'atar and Jisr al-Basha and the Moslem slum suburb of Naba'a. Within a week, Jisr al-Basha fell, and the Christians increased the intensity of their assaults on the other two targets. By early July, the fight for Tel al-Za'atar had widened to include other fronts in Lebanon. This time the Christian forces took the initiative with the participation of the Syrian troops, who pinned down Palestinian units in the mountains and blockaded crucial arms deliveries, thus allowing the Rightists not only to maintain their assault on the Leftist enclaves around Beirut, but also to score notable military victories against the Palestinians and the Lebanese Moslems in the north of the country. Indeed, after weeks of doggedly defending their enclaves, the Leftists surrendered in Naba'a on 6 August, and exactly a week later, they were finally defeated in Tel al-Za'atar, having defended the camp for fifty-two days.

The long-drawn Leftist resistance at Tel al-Za'atar could not obscure the reality of the new situation—that the Syrian-Christian alliance was gradually, yet systematically, defeating the Palestinians and their Moslem allies. Indeed, during the rest of August the Lebanese Right continued to score victories against the Left throughout Lebanon. Even so, the position of the Syrians was becoming untenable. With two of their best divisions operating only in a supportive and thus peripheral capacity in Lebanon, and thus unable to achieve the Syrian declared objective of bringing back peace and security to the divided country, the Syrian decision-makers were bound to become wary about the persistent uncertainty of the situation. Particularly worrying was the possible adverse effects of the Lebanese impasse on the morale of the Syrian armed forces. In mid-September, the Syrians arranged for a meeting between Yasir Arafat, the Chairman of the PLO, Ilyas Sarkis, the President of Lebanon, and Naji Jamil, Syria's Chief of Security. The meeting convened

on 20 September and was very quickly deadlocked. Arafat demanded the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon, but Jamil rejected the proposal on the grounds that 'it would be a prelude to announcing the partitioning of Lebanon or, more precisely, a confirmation of partitioning which you (the Palestinians) and the Maronites have imposed on the Lebanese'.⁸¹ As no satisfactory conclusion was forthcoming, President Asad convened a meeting of the *ad hoc* decision-making Cabinet on 22 September in Damascus, and a decision was unanimously reached to give the Palestinians five days to agree to withdraw peacefully from the Lebanese mountains. If compliance was not forthcoming at the end of this period, the military option would be used (Decision Ten). President Asad was given responsibility for dealing with subsequent developments.⁸² Immediately after this meeting, Generals Shihabi and Jamil left for al-Beqa' in Lebanon to inspect the Syrian troops there,⁸³ and reports from Israel and Lebanon confirmed that Syrian forces were planning for a major attack. Nevertheless, in a later meeting of all Palestinian and Lebanese Leftist leadership under the chairmanship of Kamal Jumblatt, the Syrian 'ultimatum' was rejected because it did not include similar withdrawals by Syrian and Christian troops in the area.⁸⁴ Thus, on 28 September, the Syrians launched a massive offensive against the Leftist positions in the Lebanese mountains. Six hours later, Arafat was feverishly appealing to Arab leaders, including Sadat of Egypt, Khalid of Saudi Arabia and Boumedienne of Algeria, to save the Palestinians 'from this new massacre'.⁸⁵ Indeed, by 30 September the Syrians had inflicted a total defeat on the Palestinian/Moslem forces. The level of threat perception correspondingly decreased and the time factor was no longer a crucial constraint. To the Syrian decision-makers, therefore, 30 September marked the end of the crisis period and the beginning of the post-crisis period.

NOTES

1. See p. 93.
2. Salibi, *op. cit.*, p. 150.
3. *SWB*, ME/5266/A/5, 22 July, 1976; Bulloch, *op. cit.*, p. 103.
4. *SWB*, ME/5111/i, 19 January 1976.

5. Assad, op. cit., p. 23.
6. Ibid., p. 24.
7. See p. 100.
8. See pp. 100–1.
9. Assad, op. cit., p. 26.
10. Interviews with Dawoodi and al-Khani.
11. Assad, op. cit., p. 28.
12. *SWB*, ME/5266/A/6, 22 July, 1976; *SWB*, ME/5114/A/2, 22 January 1976.
13. *SWB*, ME/5117/A/7, 26 January 1976.
14. *Al-Thawra* (Damascus) 1 April 1976.
15. *Guardian* (London) 23 January 1976.
16. *SWB*, ME/5115/A/7–8, 23 January 1976.
17. Bulloch, op. cit., p. 114.
18. Salibi, op. cit., pp. 163–4.
19. *SWB*, ME/5266/A/6–7, 22 July 1976.
20. Bulloch, op. cit., p. 116.
21. Ibid., p. 118.
22. *Al-Thawra* (Damascus) 1 April 1976.
23. *New York Times* 28 February 1976.
24. *Financial Times* (London) 5 March 1976.
25. *The Times* (London) 6 March 1976.
26. *Financial Times* (London) 10 March 1976.
27. *Al-Thawra* (Damascus) 1 April 1976.
28. *Financial Times* (London) 11 March 1976.
29. *Al-Thawra* (Damascus) 1 April 1976.
30. *SWB*, ME/5158/A/13, 13 March 1976.
31. Assad, op. cit., pp. 35–6.
32. *New York Times*, 14 March 1976.
33. Assad, op. cit., p. 36.
34. Jweijati interview.
35. *International Herald Tribune* (Paris) 17 March 1976.
36. Assad, op. cit., p. 37, *al-Thawra* (Damascus) 1 April 1976.
37. Assad, op. cit., p. 38.
38. Bulloch, op. cit., p. 126.
39. *International Herald Tribune* (Paris) 25 March 1976.
40. Bulloch, op. cit., p. 126.
41. Iskander interview.
42. Bulloch, op. cit., p. 128.
43. Assad, op. cit., pp. 39–42.
44. Ibid., pp. 42–3.
45. Ibid., pp. 46–7.
46. *Guardian* (London) 31 March 1976; *The Daily Telegraph* (London) 1 April 1976.
47. *SWB*, ME/5175/A/1, 2 April 1976.
48. *SWB*, ME/5175/A/1, 2 April 1976.
49. See Assad, op. cit., pp. 43–51; This conclusion also emerged from the interviews conducted with Dawoodi, al-Khani, Jweijati, and Iskander.
50. *New York Times* 12 April 1976.
51. *The Times* (London) 13 April 1976.

52. *SWB*, ME/5267/A/7, 23 July 1976.
53. *SWB*, ME/5186/A/6, 15 April 1976.
54. Salibi, op. cit., p. 155.
55. *SWB*, ME/5186/A/6, 15 April 1976.
56. Assad, op. cit., p. 51.
57. *SWB*, ME/5187/A/4, 20 April 1976; also Assad, op. cit., pp. 52–4.
58. *SWB*, ME/5187/A/4, 20 April 1976.
59. *The Daily Telegraph* (London) 29 April 1976; see also Bulloch, op. cit., p. 135.
60. *International Herald Tribune* (Paris) 8 May 1976.
61. *SWB*, ME/5203/A/3, 8 May 1976.
62. *The Times* (London) 15 May 1976.
63. *The Daily Telegraph* (London) 19 May 1976.
64. *The Financial Times* (London) 18 May 1976.
65. Dawoodi Interview.
66. *The Financial Times* (London) 19 May 1976.
67. Dawoodi Interview.
68. *The Observer Foreign News Service* (London) 26 May 1976.
69. Bulloch, op. cit., p. 138.
70. *The Times* (London) 21 May 1976.
71. *International Herald Tribune* (Paris) 5 June 1976; see also *The Times* (London) 18 May, 1976; *The Financial Times* (London) 21 May 1976; *New York Times*, 3 June 1976; Iskander interview.
72. Bulloch, op. cit., pp. 144–52.
73. See, for example, *al-Bilad* (Jeddah), 4 June 1976; and *Okaz* (Jeddah) 8 June 1976.
74. *Al-Thawra* (Baghdad) 2 June 1976; *al-Jumhuriya* (Baghdad) 3 June 1976.
75. *Al-Thawra* (Baghdad) 9 June 1976.
76. *Soviet News* (London) 15 June 1976; *New York Times* 10 June 1976.
77. *Events* (London) 1 October 1976, p. 23; *Guardian* (London) 3 October 1976.
78. *International Herald Tribune* (Paris) 3 October 1977; *Events* (London) 21 October 1977, p. 5.
79. Interview conducted by Dr Karen Dawisha on 6 May 1977.
80. *Tashrin* (Damascus) 10 June 1976.
81. *Events* (London) 1 October 1976, p. 8.
82. *Al-Safir* (Beirut) 30 September 1976; *Guardian* (London) 1 October 1976; Interviews with Iskander, Dawoodi and Omran.
83. *SWB*, ME/5319/A/6–7, 23 September 1976.
84. *Guardian* (London) 1 October 1976.
85. *The Times* (London) 29 September 1976.

Part Four

Post-Crisis Period

30 September–15 November 1976

8 Decisions and Environment

Decisions

During the post-crisis period, three major decisions were taken. They all occurred in the first phase of the period (30 September–15 October 1976). The second phase of the period (15 October–15 November 1976) witnessed the implementation of the Riyadh summit conference which cemented Syria's preponderance in Lebanon. The three decisions were:

Decision Eleven was taken on 30 September by President Asad, in which the Syrian offensive was halted, and an offer of peace talks was made to the defeated Palestinian forces in a last-ditch Syrian effort to neutralise the Palestinians by diplomatic rather than military means and to completely isolate the radical Jumblatt forces.

Decision Twelve occurred on 11 October after the failure of the Syrian diplomatic initiative. A second massive offensive was launched with the objective of terminating the conflict once and for all and improving the bargaining position of the Syrian decision-makers at the forthcoming Arab summit conference.

Decision Thirteen was a strategic decision taken on 15 October, in which President Asad and the Syrian leadership accepted a Saudi invitation to attend a mini-summit conference in Riyadh in order to resolve the conflict peacefully.

The Decision-Makers

During the post-crisis period, the primary decision-making unit continued to be the *ad hoc* Cabinet formed by President Asad at the beginning of the crisis period, consisting of the President, Foreign Minister Khaddam, Chief of the Air Force and National Security Jamil, Chief of Staff Shihabi, ex-Prime Minister

Ayyoubi, Assistant Secretary-General of the Baath Party al Ahmar, Assistant Secretary-General of the Party's Regional Command Bajbouj, Chief of Security in the Air Force al-Kholi, and leader of al-Saiqa guerrilla group Mohsen. It is interesting that although he was replaced as Prime Minister by General Abdul Rahman Khleifawi in August 1976, Mahmoud al-Ayyoubi continued to be a member of the *ad hoc* Cabinet.¹ Indeed, the new Prime Minister did not participate in the decision-making process concerning Lebanon—a situation that supports the assumption that Khleifawi's appointment was meant to increase the confidence of the armed forces in the Syrian regime.² Thus the cabinet changes of August 1976 in no way changed or affected the membership of the *ad hoc* decision-making Cabinet concerned with Lebanese affairs.

It must be stressed, however, that not all of the three decisions of the post-crisis period were taken by the entire membership of the *ad hoc* Cabinet. Only Decision Thirteen to attend the mini-summit, which represented 'a major change of policy necessitating a rigorous approach',³ was taken collectively by the *ad hoc* Cabinet. Decision Eleven to halt the Syrian offensive was taken by the President, and Decision Twelve to resume the offensive was agreed upon by the decision-making committee of Asad, Khaddam, Jamil and Shihabi. In other words, the size of the decision-making unit during the post-crisis period ranged from a minimum of one to a maximum of nine.

The Psychological Environment

The same assumptions concerning the ideological uniformity of the decision-making group, the unanimous concern of the group's members with elite perpetuation, and the unifying presence of the Chief Executive, made with regard to the *ad hoc* decision-making Cabinet in the crisis period were still operative during the post-crisis period. Consequently, the *ad hoc* Cabinet in this period will similarly be treated as a collectivity in the analysis of its members' attitudes and images.

Values and Attitudes

During the first phase of the post-crisis period, the Syrian

leadership persisted with its belief that the events in Lebanon were a part of a much wider plot, formulated by 'imperialist and Zionist' forces, and aimed principally at the Syrian Republic. A statement issued by the National Command of the Baath Party on 5 October 1976 clearly shows this attitudinal orientation. According to this official statement,

Lebanon—with its political and military structure, its social reality and the methods pursued by the deviating leaderships there—was fertile ground for causing bloody events in an attempt to create difficulties for Syria at its Western narrows, to involve it in the struggle to foil the plot there, thus turning that struggle into an intra-Arab one so that the Resistance would be exhausted and dragged into internecine rivalries in areas other than the arena of Palestine. This was done in an attempt to bring about a new partition of the lands of the Arabs, in which sectarian states would be created which would constitute a new burden to the Arab struggle, harm the humanitarian aspect of the Arab cause, serve the Zionist plan—founded on racist and sectarian bases—and provide international justification for the continued existence of the Zionist entity.⁴

Derived from this basic belief was a growing Syrian conviction that the Palestinians had allowed themselves to be part of this international conspiracy. The Syrians reiterated more than once during the crisis period that the participation of the Palestinians in the civil war in Lebanon was contradictory with the national aims of the Arab world generally and the Palestinian Movement in particular. This belief continued to pervade Syrian attitudinal and ideological orientations during the first phase of the post-crisis period. In an interview published on 1 October 1976, President Asad fully articulated this basic concern of the Syrian leadership during this phase. To the President, the Palestine Resistance

does not have any right to interfere in the internal affairs of the host country. For the Resistance to get involved in Lebanese affairs is, in effect, a conspiracy against the Palestine cause. Firstly, it dissipates Arab potential and deviates it from its dedicated course, the cause of Palestine. Secondly, it transforms the Arab–Israeli conflict into a conflict between Arabs.

Thirdly, Palestinian intervention in Lebanon's internal affairs is a reactionary move even by Marxist standards. The struggle against Zionism is the yardstick of how reactionary or progressive people are. Any Palestinian or Arab potential diverted from the battle against Zionism and directed towards national forces is a reactionary move, even if those national forces happen to be right wing.⁵

After the Syrian troops stopped their offensive in Lebanon and began to police the country in their new role as the Arab League's peacekeeping forces, Syrian-Palestinian relations improved considerably. During the second phase of the post-crisis period, therefore, the virulence of Syrian condemnation of Palestinian activities in Lebanon was appreciably toned down. Thus, to the militant Syrian Foreign Minister Abd al-Halim Khaddam, the dispute which arose between Syria and the Palestinians constituted 'a grave setback to Arab solidarity'. The Minister explained that the 'action against the Palestinians was motivated by a genuine Syrian conviction that the continuation of the war in Lebanon would lead to that country's disintegration and even to the destruction of the Palestine Revolution'. Finally in a clear emphasis on the improving Syrian-Palestinian relations, the Syrian Foreign Minister promised that 'those Palestinians who want to direct their struggle against the Zionist enemy will always find support and shelter in Syria. This is how the country has been, and that is how it will remain.'⁶ Thus while the attitudinal prism remained fundamentally unaltered during the second phase of the post-crisis period, it was being expressed far less virulently and with a greater conciliatory orientation.

Images

In the global system, Syrian perceptions of the Soviet Union remained negative during the first phase of the post-crisis period. This perceptual hostility, carried through from the third phase of the crisis period, represented the Syrian response to Soviet displeasure with Syria's intervention against the Palestinian and Moslem forces in Lebanon.⁷ President Asad explained that Soviet hostility was based on 'the premise that Syria's action was robbing nationalist (Leftist) forces of the chance to establish a

progressive regime in Lebanon'.⁸ To the Syrians, who considered themselves the champions and guarantors of progressive movements in the area, this assessment of Soviet attitudes was particularly irritating, especially since the Syrian leaders seem to have attributed a political and strategic, rather than ideological, motive to the Soviet displeasure. The Syrians believed that

The Soviet position could be traced to their loss of naval facilities in Alexandria and Mersy Matruh in Egypt. They needed bases in the Mediterranean. This was requested from Syria but was categorically refused. It seems, therefore, that the Russians hoped that in the eventuality of the Left and Palestinians controlling Lebanon, they would be given naval facilities. In the talks between Khaddam and Gromyko in July 1977, the Syrian Foreign Minister tried to impress upon his Soviet counterpart that this thinking is a mere illusion.⁹

This perceptual antagonism decreased during the second phase of the post-crisis period. The Syrians responded positively to the cautious Soviet approval of the cease-fire on 15 October.¹⁰ Because of Syria's long association with the Soviet Union, a reciprocal appreciation of each other's capabilities had developed between the Soviet and Syrian leaderships. In the Riyadh summit, President Asad reportedly told the other Arab leaders: 'Leave the Soviets to me. We know each other well; what makes one support the other, or go against his views and movements. . . . The Soviet Union's cards may not be sufficient to achieve a peaceful settlement, but they are enough to prevent one'.¹¹ Although relations with the Communist superpower were not fully normalised until Asad's visit to Moscow in April 1977, the gradual improvement began with the decrease in the level of perceptual hostility during the second phase of post-crisis period.

In the case of the other superpower, Syrian perceptions remained ambivalent. The relative inactivity of the United States in the Lebanese issue-area, which was due to the preoccupation of the American Administration with the forthcoming presidential election,¹² was accordingly met with a reciprocal perceptual neutrality by the Syrians. There were hardly any Syrian articulated images of the United States during the post-crisis period, and apart from a few and isolated antagonistic reports in the Syrian press, the Syrian leaders did not seem to be unduly

preoccupied with, or concerned over, possible American intentions and activities with regard to Lebanon.

In the regional system, a crucial Syrian image was obviously that of the Palestinians. During the post-crisis period, the level of Syrian perceptual hostility towards the Palestinians decreased considerably. The Syrians insisted that their struggle in Lebanon was aimed against the 'separatists' and that 'it was regrettable and tragic that the leaderships of some Resistance factions allowed themselves to be dragged into the trap'.¹³ This decline in the level of perceptual hostility was further reinforced during the second phase of the post-crisis period, when the Syrians reverted to their earlier and traditional role of being the Palestinians' natural allies and mentors. While Syria's basic posture in relation to the Palestinians' activities in Lebanon remained fundamentally unaltered from its declared position during the second and third phases of the crisis period, there was, nevertheless, a slight yet significant shift of emphasis. In the Riyadh summit, President Asad explained Syria's position in the post-crisis period thus:

First, everyone must know that we in Syria, more than anyone else, are determined to see the Palestinian presence preserved. A Palestinian 'void' means the clock will be turned back for the Arabs by 15 years. But the Palestinians fell victims of Kamal Jumblatt who convinced Arafat and his mates that the Left was able to establish a progressive Leftist state in Lebanon. At the same time, George Habbash (P.F.L.P. leader) said it did not matter if Lebanon was partitioned. 'We shall liberate the other half later . . .' We backed the Palestinians in Lebanon when they faced liquidation. We stood against them when it became a question of partition.¹⁴

Perceptually, therefore, the Syrians, during the post-crisis period, showed a clear propensity to shift the blame away from the Palestinians, directing their hostility primarily at the forces of the 'National Movement' under Kamal Jumblatt. Nevertheless, by insisting on reiterating their fundamental beliefs and attitudes, the Syrian leaders were intimating to the Palestinians that the continued softening of Syrian images was dependent on the Palestinians' strict adherence to the ideological position of the Damascus regime.

A similar change occurred in Syrian perceptions of Egypt during the post-crisis period. In the first phase of the period, the Syrian leaders continued to hold negative perceptions of the Egyptian regime. The efforts by the Egyptians to assist Kamal Jumblatt in the wake of the Syrian offensive on 30 September by lobbying other Arab leaders, particularly the Saudis, by arranging for the Druze leader to meet French high officials, and by helping the Baghdad authorities to transport Iraqi and Palestinian volunteers to Lebanon,¹⁵ only served to increase Syrian antipathies towards 'the conspiratorial regime in Egypt, which has abandoned by treaty (the Sinai interim agreement) the soil of the homeland and the Palestine cause, brought a direct US presence into the land of Egypt, and allowed the passage of the enemy's goods through the Arab Suez Canal'.¹⁶ At this stage, Syrian enmity towards the Egyptian regime hardly seemed transient.

Yet, with the convening of the Riyadh summit, a dramatic shift in Syrian perceptions occurred. The reconciliation of the Egyptian and Syrian Presidents, brought about principally through the efforts of the Saudi and Kuwaiti paymasters, contributed to a sudden and substantial decrease in the level of Syrian perceptual hostility during the second phase of the post-crisis period. At Riyadh, Asad told the Sheikh of Kuwait that the disagreement between him and Sadat was over tactical matters, rather than strategic concerns.¹⁷ Sadat, emphasising this radical perceptual change, told reporters in Riyadh that he and the Syrian President have resolved all their differences, and they now stood as 'brothers with one understanding'.¹⁸ Ten days later in the larger summit in Cairo, the Syrian President told his Arab colleagues: 'The other day, brothers, I met brother President Anwar al-Sadat in Riyadh, and everything regained its purity'.¹⁹ This positive image was to persist throughout the second phase of the period and continue for another twelve months.

This was obviously not the case with Iraq. The entire post-crisis period witnessed a continuation of the perceptual polarisation that existed between the two Baathist regimes throughout the pre-crisis and crisis periods. Syrian perceptual hostility was a direct response to Iraqi activities in the operational environment. Iraqi troops, who were allegedly transported to Sidon aboard Egyptian ships,²⁰ fought alongside the Leftist forces against the invading Syrian Army. Estimates of their strength varied. Camille

Chamoun told a press conference that they numbered 14,000, whereas Palestinian sources put the number at the much lower figure of 4,000. Syrian intelligence reports said their numbers varied between 6,000 and 7,000.²¹ These troops were particularly active in Beirut against Syrian-backed forces such as al-Saiqa.

Given this involvement, the Iraqis were bound to condemn the Riyadh summit because 'its resolutions by-passed other Arab regimes, ridiculed their views, ignored their feelings, and did not make a minimum response to the will of the Arab masses and the pan-Arab interest'.²² Syria's response to this attack was immediate and equally hostile. The Syrian Minister of Information, Ahmad Iskander, in a press conference, attacked the Iraqi regime for desiring 'a continuation of the Lebanese tragedy, for sabotaging inter-Arab relations, and for cheap trading in the cause of our Palestinian people'.²³ And when the Iraqis later announced their intention to resist the entry into Beirut of the mainly Syrian Arab Peacekeeping Force,²⁴ Asad scornfully and contemptuously castigated the Iraqi regime for opposing 'the united Arab will to bring peace to Lebanon knowing only too well they have not the forces to make a stand there . . . we will give the Iraqis another chance to review their position before we enter Beirut'.²⁵ The fact that the Iraqi regime did review its position and duly withdrew its forces must have only increased Syrian perceptual contempt for their Baathist neighbours.

Similar deep-rooted antipathy, but by no means disrespect, characterised Syrian perceptions of Israeli motives and intentions during the post-crisis period. The Syrian leaders were convinced that the fighting in Lebanon was serving Israel's interests, and because of this, the Syrians believed that the Jewish state was actively involved in fuelling the 'imperialist and Zionist plot'.²⁶ Thus, to the Syrian leadership, 'the successful conclusion of the conflict in Lebanon, and the emerging united Arab front after the Riyadh and Cairo summits, robbed Israel of the chance to achieve its long-term goal of annexing Southern Lebanon'.²⁷ To the Syrians, the continuation of the military stalemate in Lebanon which pervaded the summer months of 1976 would have been ultimately used by the Israelis as a pretext for intervening in Lebanon. There is no doubt that this fear of 'Israeli expansionism' permeated Syrian perceptual patterns.

In complete contrast, Syrian images of Jordan during this period were highly favourable. In this there was a direct

correlation between Jordan's constant support for Syrian policies in Lebanon and the positive perception held by the Syrian leaders of the Hashemite monarchy. This was particularly the case when the Jordanian government officially condoned the Syrian operations in Lebanon in the post-crisis period as a necessary activity to 'foil the partitioning of Lebanon, and to restore harmony and unity among the various sects of Lebanon'.²⁸ Naturally, therefore, the Syrian leadership considered the Jordanian king as its most valuable ally in inter-Arab rivalries. This is why the Syrians endeavoured to include Jordan in the Riyadh summit. To the Syrians, Jordan 'stood by Syria throughout the Lebanese conflict, and always understood fully Syria's motives in Lebanon'.²⁹ There is no doubt that during this period, as in the other periods of the crisis, Jordan was considered by the Syrian decision-makers as their most trusted and fraternal ally.

During the first phase of the period, there were no articulated perceptions of the Saudi regime, even though the Saudis voiced their own displeasure with Syria's offensive against the Leftists, and its refusal to attend a six-nation summit in Riyadh on 2 October.³⁰ This could probably be attributed to the reluctance of the Syrian leaders to antagonise their Saudi paymasters. In the second phase, however, the successful conclusion of the Riyadh summit brought warm Syrian praise for the Saudi role 'in spearheading diplomatic efforts to end the conflict and preserve the unity of Lebanon'.³¹ Indeed, when Asad arrived in Riyadh on 16 October for the summit meeting, he declared that he had ordered his troops to stop fighting as a gesture of goodwill to King Khalid of Saudi Arabia.³² It is interesting that Asad's acceptance of a cease-fire in Lebanon and his subsequent reconciliation with President Sadat of Egypt were accompanied by a Saudi promise to reactivate their annual financial subsidy to Syria, and to compensate her for the economic loss incurred by the high cost of the intervention.³³ No doubt, Saudi Arabia's massive financial capability was a contributory factor to the positive Syrian image, particularly as the mounting economic problems, coupled with the Syrian offensives against the Moslems/Palestinians coalition led to some manifestations of social discontent inside Syria. There were reports of disturbances in the northern, primarily Sunni, cities of Homs, Hama and Aleppo during the first phase of the post-crisis period.³⁴ However, the domestic position of President Asad and the Syrian leadership was dramatically improved

during the second phase of the post-crisis period in the wake of Asad's diplomatic victory at the Riyadh summit and the legitimisation of Syria's presence in Lebanon.

Syrian images of the operational environment, therefore, seemed to follow closely on relevant operational changes. Syrian perceptions were thus influenced, if not conditioned, by the activities and behaviour of other actors. It is interesting to note that while Syrian perceptions of actors and events frequently changed, particularly after the Riyadh summit, Syrian values and attitudes remained constant through the period. Thus, the major and radical shifts in Syria's policy which occurred during the post-crisis period seem to have resulted from changes in the policies and behaviour of other actors, rather than from variance in the attitudinal prism of the Syrian decision-makers.

NOTES

1. Iskander interview.
2. *New York Times*, 2 August 1976; *Guardian* (London) 2 August 1976; Dr Rafiq Jweijati suggested that Khleifawi's appointment was made 'to relieve the President of the burdens of the domestic arena due to the President's preoccupation with the Lebanese problem'.
3. Iskander interview. Similar opinions were voiced by Dawoodi, al-Khani and Omran.
4. *SWB*, ME/5331/A/4, 7 October 1976.
5. *Events* (London) 1 October 1976, p. 19.
6. *Al-Thawra* (Damascus) 17 November 1976.
7. This displeasure was epitomised in a *Pravda* editorial on 13 October 1976 which lamented that 'glimmering hopes for a change for the better in the Lebanese situation had been snuffed out by the new military onslaught. On the one hand, Syrian representatives had agreed to hold talks on a cease-fire, while on the other, Syrian troops torpedoed efforts towards a peaceful settlement'. The Soviet concern was obviously related to the extreme vulnerability of the military position of the Palestinian/Moslem forces in Lebanon.
8. *Events* (London) 1 October 1976, p. 21.
9. Iskander interview.
10. It must be noted, however, that the Soviet leaders were not particularly keen on the mini-summit in Saudi Arabia which followed the end of hostilities. In an address to the Communist Party Central Committee on 25 October 1976, Secretary-General Leonid Brezhnev said that Syria 'had unfortunately found herself involved in the military operations in Lebanon'. He added that it was essential 'to normalise relations between Syria and the Palestinians to foil the plot perpetrated by NATO which employed certain

reactionary forces in Lebanon and armed them to deal a blow to the Arab revolt against imperialism, Israel and Saudi Arabia through attacking the Palestinians and Lebanese Leftists' (*Events* (London) 3 December 1976). The Soviets felt that only in an atmosphere of relative tranquillity would they be able to bring about a reconciliation between the Syrians and the Palestinian/Leftist coalition in Lebanon, thus effecting once more an 'alliance of progressive forces in the area'. Moreover, the cessation of hostilities would afford the Soviets the chance to renormalise relations with Syria, hitherto the Soviet Union's foremost ally in the area. However, both goals were endangered by the emergence of Saudi Arabia as a pivotal actor in inter-Arab politics, hence the bitter attack by the Soviet leader on the conservative kingdom.

11. *Events* (London) 6 May 1977, p. 15.
12. Faced with a difficult up-hill struggle against a strong Democratic candidate, and fearing adverse reactions from the powerful Jewish lobby, the Ford Administration showed little inclination to become an active participant in the Lebanese problem. Their response was restricted to an official statement publicly proclaiming United States support for the Riyadh summit meetings. See *New York Times*, 19 October 1976.
13. *SWB*, ME/5331/A/4, 7 October 1976.
14. *Events* (London) 5 November 1976. This report is confirmed by Iskander.
15. *Events* (London) 3 December 1976, p. 19.
16. Statement by the National Command of the Baath Party issued on 5 October 1976 (*SWB*, ME/5331/A/4, 7 October 1976). President Sadat's response in this escalating verbal war was immediate. In an interview given on the third anniversary of the October war, the Egyptian leader said: 'We are celebrating here because all the Arab nation and every Arab should celebrate this day—except Syria. This is because the tangled and rancorous Alawite Baath Party is diverting the attention of its people away from its impotence by restoring the state of fragmentation to its people and by killing the Palestinians and Lebanese. . . . The aim of Syrian manoeuvres is first to liquidate the Palestinian Resistance, and second to get rid of the leadership of the Resistance' (*SWB*, ME/5332/A/3, 8 October 1976).
17. *Events* (London) 5 November 1976, p. 18.
18. *SWB*, ME/5342/A/7, 20 October 1976.
19. *SWB*, ME/5348/A/2, 27 October 1976.
20. This information was published by the Lebanese paper *al-Nahar* and was based on the confessions of captured Iraqis. See *Events* (London) 3 December 1976.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *SWB*, ME/5345/A/2, 23 October 1976.
23. *SWB*, ME/5349/A/11, 28 October 1976.
24. See *Events* (London), 5 November 1976, p. 7.
25. *Ibid.*, 3 December 1976, p. 20.
26. *SWB*, ME/5331/A/4–5, 7 October 1976; See also *al-Baath*, (Damascus), 6 October, 1976.
27. Al-Khani interview.
28. *Al-Nahar* (Beirut), 14 October, 1976; *SWB*, ME/5348/A/3, 27 October 1976.
29. *SWB*, ME/5329/A/3, 5 October 1976.

30. Saudi Arabia decided to withdraw its token force from the Golan Heights, stationed there since the October war of 1973, as a manifestation of its disapproval of Syrian policies. Moreover, for the first time since 1973, vehement criticisms of, and protestations against, the Syrian offensive in the Lebanese mountains began to appear in the Saudi Press. See *al-Safir* (Beirut), 2 October 1976, *al-Bilad* (Jeddah), 4 October 1976, *Okaz* (Jeddah) 2 October 1976.
31. *SWB*, ME/5343/A/3, 21 October 1976.
32. *New York Times*, 17 October 1976.
33. *The Financial Times* (London) 21 October 1976.
34. *New York Times*, 24 October 1976; *The Financial Times* (London) 21 October 1976.

9 Decision Process

Phase One: 30 September–15 October, 1976

Forty-eight hours after launching their offensive against the Moslem–Palestinian forces, the Syrian troops had achieved a stunning victory leaving the Leftist alliance in total disarray. It was this dramatic and consequential shift in the military balance in favour of the Syrian Army that signalled the end of the crisis period for the Syrian decision-makers. The Palestinians hastily retreated from all their mountain strongholds above the main Beirut–Damascus road, which they had occupied since their initial thrust in January 1976. In the evening of 30 September, President Asad ordered his troops to stop their advance against the Leftist alliance and made an offer of peace talks to the Palestinian leadership (Decision Eleven). The initial, almost immediate, impulse for this decision was the President's distaste for fighting his former allies and protégés, the Palestinians. Having exhibited Syrian resolve and capability, he hoped that Syrian objectives could be achieved without resort to further bloodshed of the Palestinians. He thus seems to have instinctively repeated the decision following the June intervention which contributed to the ensuing military and political stalemate. However, apart from this instinctive response, the Syrian President sought to neutralise the Palestinians through diplomatic rather than military means for three other reasons. In the first place, the President and the Syrian leadership were convinced that the major 'culprit' was not the Palestinians but Kamal Jumblatt and his mainly Lebanese 'National Movement', and that the Palestinians had unwittingly permitted themselves to be influenced and dictated to by Jumblatt's intransigence. The offer of peace talks would thus afford the Palestinian leadership a chance to disengage itself from the Lebanese radical Leftists and return to the Syrian fold. Secondly, while the Syrians were able to achieve a swift military advance against the Moslem and

Palestinian forces on 28–30 September, reports indicated that the Palestinians, aided by the Lebanese Leftists, were preparing for a last-ditch defence against the Syrians in the mountains near Bhamdoun and Allayh.¹ While the Syrians would undoubtedly have won the battle, their victory, nevertheless, would have been achieved at a considerable human and material cost. Diplomatically to neutralise the Palestinians, who were after all the major military proposition, represented a rational strategic decision on the part of the Syrian decision-makers. Finally, the achievement of the totality of Syrian objectives in the Lebanese conflict through diplomatic rather than military means would have been more readily sanctioned by the other Arab regimes and more easily accepted by the Syrian population itself.

The decision was implemented the following day, when Foreign Minister Khaddam and Major-General Naji Jamil attended an all-night meeting with Palestinian leaders in the Syrian-controlled Lebanese town of Sofar. The Syrian terms for a truce included the abandonment by the Palestinian forces and their Leftist allies of the two key mountain towns of Allayh and Bhamdoun, and negotiations to be conducted on the basis of the 1969 Cairo agreement which regulated Palestinian presence in Lebanon. These negotiations were to be supervised by the Syrians and the consequent resolutions implemented within fifteen days. However, while the leaders of the mainstream moderate Palestinians inside the PLO fully appreciated the weakness of their position *vis-à-vis* the Syrians, they nevertheless felt unable to accept the 'harsh Syrian demands'.² They were constrained by the more radical Palestinian groups such as the PFLP and the PDFLP, who considered an acceptance of Syrian conditions to be tantamount to 'capitulation'.³ To be perceived by the Palestinians and Leftists as bowing to, and wilting under, Syrian pressure would have greatly weakened the position of Yasir Arafat and the leadership of al-Fatah. At the end of the meeting, therefore, Arafat emerged to tell waiting reporters that the Syrian offer was rejected.⁴ Nevertheless, in order not to completely destroy the Syrian initiative, it was tentatively agreed to hold a further meeting at a later date.

Upon their return to Damascus, Khaddam and Jamil briefed the Syrian President on the Sofar meeting, and the consensus of opinion was that 'Arafat had become completely imprisoned by the attitudes and policies of the extremists in his organisation and

by his association with Kamal Jumblatt'.⁵ It thus became obvious to the Syrian leaders that their diplomatic initiative had, in these circumstances, little chance of success. The Syrians, therefore, realised that in order to achieve their objectives, they would need to use the military option decisively. Preparations thus began to deliver the final blow at the appropriate time.

On his part, Kamal Jumblatt managed to slip out of Lebanon and go to Egypt. In Cairo, he was promised material help as well as diplomatic support. The Egyptians also arranged for the leader of the 'National Movement' a visit to France, in which he sought active French support for the Leftists' stand against the Syrians and asked French officials to put diplomatic and economic pressure on the Syrian leadership in order to effect a Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. He also urged for French–Egyptian cooperation on this question. In a public statement, however, the French Foreign Minister said that 'before France gets involved in the Lebanese problem, it would have to receive the consent of all prospective participants. Enquiries would be made to this end through diplomatic channels. However, there was no question of a French military intervention, and even less of a Franco-Egyptian one'.⁶ Not only was France constrained by lack of capabilities, particularly in terms of logistics, but it would also be hardly expected to take the risk of engaging the Syrian Army, especially when during this phase, Syria was supporting France's traditional allies, the Christian community in Lebanon.

In the Arab world, the first, almost immediate response to Syria's military offensive in the mountains of Lebanon came from Egypt's Sadat who called for an urgent meeting in Saudi Arabia of the leaders of Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Lebanon and the PLO to discuss the Lebanese developments. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the PLO enthusiastically supported the Egyptian proposal, and the Saudis officially invited President Asad to a summit in Riyadh on 2 October. However, to the Syrian leadership, the acceptance of such a proposal would represent a fundamental shift in policy, which would require the widest possible evaluation and consultation. For the time being, therefore, the Syrians declined the Saudi invitation on the grounds that the summit meeting should not be confined to debating the Lebanese problem, but ought to discuss wider inter-Arab and Arab-Israeli issues, and that Jordan, as a confrontation state, should also be a participant.⁷ Nevertheless, while declining to

attend the summit in Riyadh, the Syrian President and the political leadership embarked upon a wide-ranging consultative process to decide upon Syria's future responses and courses of action.

In the early part of October, President Asad began a series of meetings with the members of the Regional and National Commands of the Baath Party, and with the Central leadership of the Progressive National Front, consisting of the Syrian Arab Socialist Union, the Socialist Union, the Arab Socialist Party, but excluding the Communist Party of Syria. During these meetings, a consensus emerged that 'the time had come to activate the political and diplomatic option on the Arab level, and that an acceptance to attend a future Arab summit would no longer hinder Syria's policies in Lebanon and in the Arab world'.⁸ It was left to the key members of the political leadership to make the 'appropriate decision in view of possible future developments'.⁹

Time was certainly on the side of the Syrian leaders in their struggle with the Leftist forces in Lebanon. The successful Syrian offensive had emphasised the ability and resolve of the Damascus regime to terminate the Lebanese conflict by force of arms if need be. The lack of an effective Arab response to Syria's offensive served to remind the Leftists in Lebanon of the wide gulf which existed between Arab rhetoric and Arab action. Moreover, although 'ready to defend the Palestinian Revolution to the last man',¹⁰ the Palestinians, having been badly mauled by the Syrian troops, had naturally become more amenable to compromise. Most crucially perhaps were the disaffections and disagreements that the successful Syrian offensive engendered within the ranks of the Lebanese Moslem community. The Leftists' defeat at the hands of the Syrians was used by the conservative Moslem leaders to attack the policies of Kamal Jumblatt and the National Movement. As Jumblatt's position weakened in the wake of the Syrian successes, the conservative Moslem leaders, whose own positions had over the previous nine months been subordinated to that of the National Movement leader, emerged to renew their traditional rivalries with the Druze chieftain. Thus, in an interview, Saeb Salam, a former Prime Minister and a prominent Sunni leader, said:

The Moslems are not Leftists, rather they are against the Left. The Left is only a minority which is using Jumblatt as a front. The Moslems refuse to permit Jumblatt to speak on their behalf

either in Lebanon or abroad. The Moslems believe in constructive dialogue and understanding, and they have been against violence from the very beginning, just as the majority of the Lebanese. The gravest mistake our Palestinian brothers made was that they allowed Jumblatt to appear as if he were their spokesman . . . while in fact, Jumblatt's objectives are quite different from those of the Palestine Resistance.¹¹

Aware of the increasing schisms in the Moslem ranks, it was prudent for the Syrians to press their advantage in their pursuit of a permanent solution to the Lebanese conflict. Moreover, in the Arab League's meetings in Chtoura during the second week of October between Syrian, Palestinian and Lebanese representatives, it had become evident to the Syrian delegates that the Palestinians themselves were becoming disillusioned with Jumblatt's intransigence. Endeavouring to precipitate the final break in the Leftist alliance, and in order to strengthen Syria's bargaining position in the summit conference of all Arab heads of state scheduled to meet in Cairo on 18 October, President Asad in a meeting with Khaddam, Jamil and Shihabi decided on 11 October to launch a further military offensive against the Moslem-Palestinian forces (Decision Twelve).

On the morning of 12 October, Syrian armour, in a two-pronged thrust, attacked Moslem and Palestinian forces, smashing through their defensive positions, and moving to within ten miles of Beirut and six miles of the southern city of Sidon in less than forty-eight hours. As the Syrian troops made their rapid advance on the first day of their offensive, Arafat broadcast the following message to all Arab kings and Presidents:

The surprise attack by the Syrian forces came at a time when Syrian-Palestinian meetings were taking place in Chtoura under the auspices of the Arab League, the latest being yesterday morning. It was agreed that the final meeting to sign the agreement be held tomorrow morning. Despite the positive spirit that was evident at these meetings and the sincere desire shown on our part to contribute effectively to solving the Lebanese crisis . . . this attack comes just before the forthcoming Arab summit meeting in order to face the conference with a situation in which it will not be possible to reach a settlement of the Lebanese problem.¹²

Arafat immediately followed this message by personally telephoning Sadat of Egypt, Boumedienne of Algeria, Qadhafi of Libya, Saddam Hussein of Iraq, Fahd of Saudi Arabia, and Mahmoud Riadh, the Secretary-General of the Arab League. The Palestinian leader also sent a special message to Brezhnev appealing to the Soviet leader to exert pressure on the Syrian decision-makers.

Once again, it was Saudi Arabia with its enormous financial capabilities which took the initiative. The Saudi leaders despatched a personal envoy to Damascus on 15 October with an 'urgent and explicit request'¹³ to Asad to attend a mini-summit in Riyadh with the leaders of Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon and the PLO. This was precisely the same request that the Saudis had made a fortnight earlier which had been rejected by the Syrians. However, the situation had radically changed in the intervening period. In the first place, the Syrian President had been able to secure the backing and approval of the Baath Party and the Progressive National Front for a Syrian participation in an Arab summit concerning the Lebanese conflict. Secondly, with the rapid and impressive successes of Syria's second offensive against the Moslem and Palestinian forces, President Asad's bargaining position in the proposed summit had considerably improved. Accordingly, the Syrian President, in a meeting with the *ad hoc* decision-making Cabinet on 15 October, agreed to attend the summit (Decision Thirteen),¹⁴ and his acceptance was immediately transmitted to the Saudis. Moreover, the President ordered his troops in Lebanon to halt hostilities forthwith pending the results of the forthcoming meeting with the other Arab leaders.

Phase Two: 15 October–15 November 1976

The summit in Riyadh began on 16 October. During the first day, Presidents Asad and Sadat met twice to resolve their differences, and by the end of the day, a reconciliation had been effected. Once this obstacle had been surmounted agreement on Lebanon was quickly reached. Predictably, it proved to be a diplomatic victory for the Syrian President. The assembled Arab leaders endorsed Syria's policies and tacitly accepted that Syria would hold the major responsibility for controlling the cease-fire and supervising

a settlement. In this, the convening Arab states were in effect legitimising Syria's actual and perceived role in Lebanon. Moreover, the Saudis and Kuwaitis promised to make good the 40 per cent cut in Syria's budget of \$3.5 billion suffered as a result of the Lebanese war.¹⁵ By the end of the conference, the Syrian President had succeeded in achieving all of Syria's objectives in Lebanon and the only seeming losers were the Leftist alliance.

On Asad's return to Damascus on 18 October, preparations for a country-wide cease-fire in Lebanon were begun. There was little enthusiasm for the Riyadh resolutions amongst the warring groups. The Leftists had clearly lost to Syrian armour and diplomacy, and the Rightists had seen victory snatched away from them by the abruptly called Syrian cease-fire. Even Rashid Karami, Syria's foremost ally in Lebanon was hardly enthusiastic. He said of the Riyadh resolutions: 'Some groups may have reservations about the result, but it is the best that could be done.'¹⁶ Nevertheless, the summit did improve Syrian-Palestinian relations, emphasised by Arafat's visit to Damascus on 20 October which resulted in making the cease-fire in Lebanon effective throughout the country.

When the postponed full Arab summit met in Cairo on 25 October, it endorsed the Riyadh resolutions and called for the establishment of a 30,000-strong Arab peace-keeping force. President Asad told the other Arab leaders that Syria would abide with the conference's resolutions regarding the composition of the force. He even offered to withdraw the entire Syrian Army from Lebanon if it could be adequately replaced in its peace enforcement role by an all-Arab force.¹⁷ While simply on its face value, this offer constituted a radical departure from Syria's hitherto obstinate rejection of 'arabising' the Lebanese conflict, in reality it represented an astute and calculating assessment of the prevalent Arab political situation on the part of the Syrian President. Apart from the token numbers that countries like Saudi Arabia, Libya, Kuwait, Tunisia and Sudan could offer, the only Arab states that could substantially contribute to the force were Egypt, Iraq, Algeria and Jordan. Because of their unacceptability to the Palestinians, and that country's close relations with Syria, the Jordanians were immediately excluded. The Algerians were preoccupied with their own struggle with the Moroccans over the Spanish Sahara. The Iraqis could hardly be expected to participate in an operation that they had consistently

and vociferously branded as 'reactionary' and 'deviationist'.¹⁸ Only Egypt, therefore, was able, and had been willing, to participate positively in the peace-keeping force. However, reports of the Christian Rightist forces occupying the border area in South Lebanon with the active help of the Israelis naturally dampened Egyptian enthusiasm. When asked by President Sarkis of Lebanon about the extent of Egypt's proposed contribution to the peace-keeping force, President Sadat reportedly answered: 'Nasser did not die in Cairo, but in the Yemen (civil war), and I am not prepared to dig my own grave in Lebanon.'¹⁹ The Egyptian President was naturally not amenable to committing the lightly armed Egyptian troops to a possible confrontation with the Israelis. Thus immediately after the pronouncement of the establishment of the 30,000-strong Arab peace-keeping force, the Syrian Minister of Information, Ahmad Iskander, confirmed over Damascus Radio that 'Syrian forces in Lebanon will form the backbone of the Arab peacekeeping force'.²⁰ Indeed, by the end of October, Syrian troops, under the banner of the Arab League, began its final advance towards Beirut, Tripoli and Sidon.

The Syrian leadership were now in complete control of the Lebanese situation. Militarily, they had decisively exhibited their superior coercive power to the conflicting Lebanese parties, and diplomatically they had succeeded in gaining the political and economic backing of the Arab world (with the notable exception of Iraq) for the Syrian role in Lebanon. Thus, when Camille Chamoun publicly stated that his Maronite militia would not allow the Syrian-dominated Arab peace-keeping forces to enter Christian-held areas, the Syrian leadership summoned a number of Christian leaders to Damascus and told them in no uncertain terms that Syria would not tolerate any obstacles by the Christians or any other group to the advance of its troops in Lebanon. Taking the hint, the head of the PLO Political Department, Farouq Kaddoumi, stated on 28 October: 'The Palestinian forces are beginning to withdraw in the face of the Syrian troops. Relations with Syria are a very vital matter for the PLO. Efforts will be dedicated to strengthening these relations and removing all vestiges of the past.'²¹ Even the virulently anti-Syrian Kamal Jumblatt had no option but to yield to the *fait accompli*. In a public statement on 9 November, which grudgingly accepted the reality of the situation but nevertheless manifested

Jumblatt's continued bitterness at the Syrian involvement, the Druze leader said:

We support the measures taken by the Command of the Arab security forces for the balanced, simultaneous entry of those forces into the isolationist and nationalist areas. We hope they will put an end to the fighting. . . . In March, the forces of the Left had been nearly successful in inflicting a total defeat on the Maronites, but then the Left was stabbed in the back and the Maronites were saved. Accordingly, the Arabs and Syrians must bring pressure to bear on the isolationist Maronites to make them give up their privileges, so that political sectarianism can be abolished, and nationalist reforms, including proportional representation, can be implemented.²²

It was precisely such demands that made the Christian leaders suspicious of the new Syrian role in Lebanon. The Christians had always realised that to the Damascus regime, Syrian-Christian collaboration was an alliance of circumstance and not of ideological commitment. The Christians, who, with the help of the Syrians, were on the verge of defeating the Leftists, were naturally worried that the Syrians would revert to their traditional pro-Palestinian role to the detriment of Christian interests. Amid mounting Christian concern, therefore, President Sarkis delivered a speech, primarily aimed at the Maronite leaders, urging them to meet the advancing Syrian forces 'with brotherly love and to understand the limited aims and noble objectives behind the entry of these forces'.²³ On 9 November, the two foremost Christian chieftains, Pierre Jumayil and Camille Chamoun, spent nearly four hours with the Lebanese President, seeking assurances over the role of the Syrian forces. They emerged from the meeting saying that 'the higher interests require the application of the Arab summit resolutions and the facilitating of the peace plan'.²⁴ No doubt the Lebanese President had also emphasised to the two Christian leaders the very limited options they possessed in the face of Syria's military power and the Arab support for the peace-keeping plan.

Having acquired the concurrence of all the conflicting parties without resort to bloodshed, the Syrian armour, under the banner of the Arab League, began to move along the coast road through Christian and Moslem-held areas towards the capital, reaching

the centre of Beirut on 15 November. Yet another chapter of Lebanon's schismatic and turbulent history had ended, though this time, only through the coercive intervention of an external actor.

NOTES

1. *New York Times*, 3 October 1976; *The Times* (London) 4 October, 1976.
2. *Guardian* (London) 2 October 1976.
3. *Al-Nahar* (Beirut) 3 October 1976.
4. *Guardian* (London) 4 October 1976.
5. Iskander interview.
6. *SWB*, ME/5329/i, 5 October 1976.
7. *New York Times*, 3 October 1976.
8. Iskander interview. Others interviewed also confirmed that 'there were the widest possible consultations on this decision'. These included Dawoodi, al-Khani and Jweijati.
9. Iskander interview.
10. *New York Times*, 6 October 1976.
11. *SWB*, M/5330/A/5, 6 October 1976.
12. *SWB*, ME/5337/A3, 14 October 1976.
13. *New York Times*, 17 October 1976.
14. In this meeting, some members reportedly urged the continuation of the military advance against the Leftist forces, particularly as many Iraqis had been able to join the forces of Kamal Jumblatt in their fight against the Syrians. It seems that it was due to Asad's authoritative leadership that the views of the meeting shifted towards halting the offensive and accepting Saudi Arabia's invitation. See *Events* (London) 3 December 1976, p. 20.
15. *The Financial Times* (London) 21 October 1976.
16. *The Times* (London) 20 October 1976.
17. Iskander interview. See also *SWB*, ME/5349/A/10, 28 October 1976.
18. *Al-Thawra* (Baghdad), 24 October 1976; *al-Jumhuriya* (Baghdad), 27 October 1976; *SWB*, ME/5350/A/6, 29 October 1976.
19. *Events* (London) 19 November 1976, p. 17.
20. *New York Times*, 28 October 1976.
21. *SWB*, ME/5351/A/6, 30 October 1976.
22. *SWB*, ME/5361/A/3, 11 November 1976.
23. *The Times* (London) 8 November 1976.
24. *Guardian* (London) 10 November 1976.

Part Five

Conclusions

10 Findings

Psychological Environment for Decisions

The attitudinal prism of the Syrian decision-makers remained constant throughout the three periods of the crisis. The concern over the unity of Lebanon and its implication for the aspirational goal of Arab unity, the belief in the 'historic and natural indivisibility of Syria and Lebanon, and the deep-rooted suspicion of Israel's intentions in the area, constituted the major values of the Syrian decision-making elite that consistently motivated policies throughout the civil war. Closely allied with these fundamental values was a strongly held Syrian conviction that the Lebanese events were a manifestation of a much wider 'plot' perpetrated by imperialist and Zionist forces against the Arab national cause. To the Syrian decision-makers, the struggle against the Zionists and their imperialist backers 'is the yardstick of how reactionary or progressive people are. Any Palestinian or Arab potential diverted from the battle against Zionism and directed towards national forces is a reactionary move, even if those national forces happen to be right-wing'.¹ The consistent adherence to this and the previously mentioned values governed the Syrian relations with, and images of, other relevant actors.

In the global system, the image of the Soviet Union remained favourable until May 1976 when the Soviet leaders grew increasingly wary of Syria's support for the Rightists in Lebanon. In June 1975 the Syrian President unequivocally declared that 'Syrian-Soviet relations were fraternal'.² Yet by October 1976, Asad's perception of the Soviet Union had changed. In an interview, the President said:

The Soviet Union has sent us a personal message [in which] Leonid Brezhnev asked me to pull the Syrian Army out of Lebanon. I considered this request simply as an expression of a point of view. We have a different point of view which is *not*

*subject to compromise because it is based on our firm national principles and interests. I had hoped that our Soviet friends would understand our basic position regarding the problem and side with us.*³ (my italics)

There is no doubt that the deterioration in Soviet–Syrian relations resulted from a basic value-divergence. Whereas the Soviet leaders believed in consistently backing the ‘progressive’ anti-Western side in Lebanon, the Syrians’ support was extended to the party which they perceived to be committed to the preservation of Lebanese unity, regardless of that party’s ideological pretensions. This attitudinal divergence began to narrow gradually after the Syrian victory in Lebanon and the normalisation of Syrian–Palestinian relations.

In the case of the other superpower, the Syrian decision-makers were extremely hostile towards the United States during the pre-crisis period, which reached a peak after the conclusion of the Sinai interim agreement between Egypt and Israel in September 1975. This was due to the Syrians’ belief in the existence of a Zionist–imperialist plot aimed at dividing and weakening the Arabs and liquidating the Palestinian cause. Thus, the Sinai agreement was perceived by the Syrians as a plot by the United States designed ‘to anaesthetise the situation in the area’.⁴ Moreover, the fighting in Lebanon was placed within this overall perceptual pattern. In a letter written by Asad to the United States Ambassador in Damascus in October 1975, the Syrian President directly blamed the United States ‘for playing a role in the fighting in Lebanon for other political reasons, primarily helping the Sinai agreement’.⁵

As contacts between the two countries increased, and the United States became progressively involved as an emissary between Syria and Israel, the level of Syria’s perceptual hostility towards the United States accordingly decreased. Nevertheless, suspicion and mistrust of US intentions in the area continued to dominate Syria’s perceptions. Thus, when the fighting in Lebanon abruptly stopped on 31 March 1976, shortly after the arrival of United States envoy L. Dean Brown, Asad’s response was one of suspicion. He later publicly commented that ‘it was surprising that the firing was suspended only after Dean Brown’s arrival in Beirut’.⁶ Indeed, even the American endorsement of Syria’s military intervention was seen as ‘a part of the US scheme

in the conflict. This (US endorsement) was publicly given at the same time that America was clandestinely fuelling the conflict'.⁷ It is interesting to note that only in the case of the United States did the Syrian image remain resilient in the face of changing environmental conditions.

Apart from the Palestinians, Syrian images of actors in the subordinate system remained constant throughout the pre-crisis and crisis periods. The Syrians were perceptually hostile to Iraq, Egypt and Israel and friendly towards Jordan and Saudi Arabia. In the post-crisis period, the only significant perceptual change occurred in relation to Egypt. As a result of the meeting between Sadat and Asad during the Riyadh mini summit, Syrian images of Egypt became more positive and relations between the two hitherto conflicting states were normalised. In all these cases, Syrian images were determined by the attitudinal prism of the Syrian decision-makers, and by the behaviour of the actors in question towards the Syrian involvement in Lebanon.

The most crucial and consequential image transformation was the sudden and dramatic change in Syrian perceptions of the Moslem–Palestinian alliance which occurred in the wake of Jumblatt's visit to Damascus at the end of March 1976.⁸ Here again, the image transformation was not due to any attitudinal shift on the part of the Syrian decision-makers but to changes in the behaviour of the Leftists in Lebanon that were perceived in Damascus as contradictory to Syrian values and interests. Particularly bitter was Syria's response to the stand taken by the PLO leadership to the Syrian military intervention in June 1976. In a major policy speech on 20 July 1976, President Asad expounded on this Syrian perception:

How much have we sacrificed for the Resistance in the past few years? Fifty per cent of the Syrian military aircraft destroyed in clashes with the enemy (Israel) before the 1973 war were in the defence of the positions of the Palestinian Resistance. Thirteen planes were lost in only one day in Urqub in defence of the Resistance. These aircrafts were manned by the elite of our pilots. . . . We lost 500 soldiers in one day. We lost them in a fight with the enemy because the enemy had hit a fida'i (guerrilla) base somewhere in Syria. The battles we fought against the enemy for the sake of the Palestine Resistance are numerous. . . . Who has done for the Resistance what Syria

has done? Who has sacrificed for the Resistance what Syria has sacrificed? All of us remember our fighting with our brothers in Jordan. . . . We engaged in violent fighting with these close brothers in 1970 and 1971 for the sake of the Resistance. Who, apart from ourselves in Syria, has done such a thing?⁹

This bitter attack on the Palestinians was part of a four-hour, unscripted speech which President Asad felt compelled to deliver as uncertainty grew about the merits of Syria's intervention in Lebanon. There is no doubt that at least part of the motivation behind the 20 July speech was the President's increasing concern over his domestic situation, a concern that was evident in the opening remarks of the speech. In these opening remarks, the President referred to 'the rumours that continue to circulate here and there', and he reiterated his faith in 'the good comprehension of the citizens and their ability to interpret the events as they should'.¹⁰ Moreover, the President tended to emphasise his close connections with the people. He reminded his listeners: 'I am not after power but am an ordinary member of this people, who will continue to feel like the people'.¹¹ As uncertainty grew, it seems, therefore, that the President, probably due to the authoritarian and personalised character of the political system, felt a greater need for a direct and personal link with the masses.

Three major conclusions are discernible. Firstly, the changes in Syria's behaviour towards other actors in the Lebanese war, particularly the Syrian withdrawal of support from the Leftist forces, resulted not from any variance in Syria's fundamental values, but from changes in the behaviour and/or images of the other actors involved. Secondly, Syrian perceptions of other actors seemed to have corresponded closely to the developing events in the operational environment. Only in the case of the United States, where Syrian suspicion and mistrust persisted even after the US change of behaviour, was this conclusion not operative. This could probably be attributed to the strength of the Syrian belief in 'imperialist-Zionist plots'. Finally, a direct and positive link seems to have existed between increasing threat perception and the Syrian decision-makers' concern over their domestic support-base.

The Pattern of Information

Communication patterns generally assumed a combination of physical and verbal acts. The physical acts related primarily to the volume and intensity of violence (e.g. murders, assassinations, hijacking, etc.). An abrupt increase or decrease of violence was meant to convey a corresponding threat or conciliation signal. The verbal acts were communicated through formal, third-party and face-to-face channels. These communications were conducted at the head of government ministerial and *ad hoc* levels. They tended to be formal and secret, although frequent leaks occurred later in major speeches, policy statements and Baath Party pronouncements. These communications occurred in the various periods and phases of the crisis, and were an important part of the Syrian leaders' information-gathering process.

As the situation moved from the pre-crisis to the crisis period, Syria's decision-making elite sought and absorbed more information. As stress became more intense, the need not only to obtain more information but also to diversify the available communication channels grew greater. In the pre-crisis period, the President depended for his information on a number of sources. For information on the responses in other Arab capitals and internationally, the Foreign Ministry prepared regular 'position papers based on Embassy information and on other diplomatic sources'.¹² These studies were passed on to Dr Adib al-Dawoodi, the President's adviser who then made the relevant material available to the President.¹³ However, because the Syrians have never maintained an embassy in Beirut, the ability of the Foreign Ministry to monitor developments in Lebanon was considerably impaired. In this case, the Ministry of Information played a compensatory role by providing the President with relevant information on Lebanon based primarily on analysing the international press. Moreover, the President received frequent synopses of the political situation in Lebanon from Khaddam, Jamil and Shihabi acquired through their peace-making visits.¹⁴ The National Command of the Baath Party also provided valuable information obtained by the Lebanese Baath organisation at the grass-roots level. Similarly, members of al-Saiqa guerrilla group, who were operating in Lebanon, passed on relevant details to their headquarters in Damascus, and to their leader Zuhair Mohsen who was a member of the Syrian National

Command.¹⁵ Finally, although very difficult to confirm, the security and intelligence machines must have been active in scanning the situation in Lebanon and transmitting the information to the President.

As the perception of threat and of time salience increased in the crisis period, and especially in the cases of Decisions Four, Nine and Ten, involving the use of force, the volume of information intensified, the channels were diversified, and standard bureaucratic procedures circumvented. Thus, Colonel Muhammed al-Kholi, the Chief of Security in the Air Force, became a member of the '*ad hoc* decision-making Cabinet'; and along with his colleague Colonel Ali al-Madani, another security and intelligence officer, were personally and regularly consulted by the President.¹⁶ Zuhair Mohsen the leader of al-Saiqa also became a personal participant in the '*ad hoc* Cabinet'. Similarly, the Minister of Information, Ahmad Iskander, became a regular member of the consultative group.¹⁷ Moreover, greater emphasis was placed on acquiring information directly from the conflict areas in Lebanon through Baathist members, Palestinian sympathisers, and Syrian regular soldiers operating in Lebanon as 'truce supervisors' or in other similar capacities.¹⁸ The President was also in frequent telephone communications with various Lebanese leaders, especially prior to and immediately after strategic decisions.¹⁹ Finally, throughout the crisis period, 'Lebanese delegations met with the President on almost daily basis',²⁰ and provided the President with valuable insights into the complexity of the Lebanese situation.

Consultative and Decisional Units in Crisis

During the entire crisis situation of the Lebanese civil war, President Asad was the most authoritative, yet by no means the only, allocator of values in Syria's political system. While responsibility for formulating foreign policy did reside with the person of the President, in very rare instances would the President take a decision, particularly an important one, without evaluations and consultations within the Government, the Baath Party, the Progressive National Front, and sometimes groups from outside the decision-making circle, such as university professors.²¹ This decisional and consultative procedure would

TABLE 10.1 Syria's decisional and consultative units during the Lebanese civil war

<i>Decision</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Decisional unit</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Consultative unit</i>	<i>Number</i>
Pre-Crisis					
D 1	Tactical	Com	4	Com + ad hoc	4
D 2	Tactical	Com	4	Com + ad hoc	4
D 3	Tactical	Com	4	Com + ad hoc	11
Crisis					
D 4	Strategic	Cab	9	RC + NC + PNF + Ind.	43
D 5	Tactical	Com	4	Com	4
D 6	Tactical	Com	4	Com	4
D 7	Tactical	Com	4	Com	4
D 8	Tactical	Com	4	Com	4
D 9	Strategic	Cab	9	RC + NC + PNF ^a + Ind.	41
D 10	Strategic	Cab	9	Cab	9
Post-Crisis					
D 11	Tactical	Pres	1	Pres	1
D 12	Tactical	Com	4	Com	4
D 13	Strategic	Cab	9	RC + NC + PNF ^a + Ind.	41

NOTE

^a Excluding the two Communist representatives.

KEY

Ad hoc = Miscellaneous choice by the PresidentCab = *Ad hoc* Decision-Making CabinetCom = *Ad hoc* Decision-Making Committee

Ind = Independent Presidential Advisers

NC = National Command of the Baath Party

Pres = President Asad

PNF = Progressive National Front

RC = Regional Command of the Baath Party

naturally vary in scope and intensity with the type of decision taken (Table 10.1).

In the first phase of the pre-crisis period, in which Decisions One and Two were taken, consultations involved Foreign Minister Abd al-Halim Khaddam, Chief of the Air Force and Internal Security Naji Jamil, and Chief of Staff Hikmat Shihabi. However, in the atmosphere of heightened perceptions of threat

characterising the second phase of the pre-crisis period, in which Decision Three was formulated and implemented, the process of consultation was widened considerably. In addition to Khaddam, Jamil and Shihabi, the expanded consultative unit consisted of the Assistant Secretary-General of the Baath Party, Abdulla al-Ahmar, the Prime Minister and member of the National Command of the Baath Party, Mahmoud al-Ayyoubi, the Assistant Secretary-General of the Regional Command of the Baath Party, Muhammed Jaber Bajbouj, the Commander of the 'Defence Companies' (the President's praetorian guard), member of the Regional Command, and the President's own brother, Rifaat al-Asad, the Palestinian leader of al-Saiqa guerrilla group and member of the National Command, Zuhair Mohsen, the other Palestinian member of the National Command Samir, al-Attari, and the Chief of Security in the Air Force, Muhammed al-Kholi. Thus, in the first two decisions of the pre-crisis period, the consultative unit numbered four, and this was increased to eleven in the case of the third decision.

In the crisis period, the consultative group varied from the core 'committee' of Asad, Khaddam, Jamil and Shihabi, to a much larger network including the entire memberships of the Regional and National Commands of the Baath Party, the eight non-Baathist members of the Central Command of the Progressive National Front, Minister of Information Ahmad Iskander, and some independent advisers such as Dr Adib al-Dawoodi, the Presidential Adviser on Foreign Affairs, General Ghassan al-Dardari, the Presidential Counsellor on Military Affairs, Colonel Muhammed al-Kholi, Chief of Security in the Air Force, and Colonel Ali-al-Madani, who along with al-Kholi were the President's special emissaries to Lebanon.

The lower parameter of four members characterised the consultative unit in the following decisions: Decision Five on 19 January 1976 to despatch Khaddam, Jamil and Shihabi to help the warring parties resolve their differences; Decision Six on 15 March 1976 to halt the advance of units of the Lebanese Arab Army on the presidential palace of Suleiman Franjeh; Decision Seven on 28 March 1976 to place an embargo on arms supplies to the Lebanese Leftists; and Decision Eight on 8 April, 1976 to concentrate more troops in the region of al-Masna'. The number increased to the maximum parameter of forty-three in the case of strategic Decision Four, taken on 18 January 1976, involving the

commitment of the Yarmouk brigade of the PLA to the Lebanese conflict. However, in the case of strategic Decision Nine (31 May 1976) to intervene militarily in Lebanon, the two communist members of the Central Command of the Progressive National Front were excluded from the consultative process, thus decreasing the number to forty-one. In Decision Ten on 22 September, 1976 the consultative unit consisted of the core 'committee' of Asad, Khaddam, Jamil and Shihabi, plus Ayyoubi, Mohsen, al-Kholi, al-Ahmar, and Muhammed Jaber Bajbouj, the Assistant Secretary-General of the Regional Command of the Baath Party. In the case of strategic Decision Ten, therefore, the number of the consultative unit was nine.

In the post-crisis period, strategic Decision Thirteen on 15 October 1976 to accept the Saudi invitation to attend the summit meeting in Riyadh, which signified a consequential shift in policy, involved the consultation of forty-one members of the decision-making elite. However, in Decision Eleven on 30 September 1976 to offer the Palestinians peace talks, there is no evidence that President Asad sought the consultation of anybody else. Finally, in Decision Twelve on 11 October 1976 to launch a second massive offensive against the Moslem and Palestinian forces, the consultative unit consisted of the core 'committee' of Asad, Khaddam, Jamil and Shihabi, thus numbering four.

In the pre-crisis period, the decisional unit consisted of the four members, including Asad, who formed the 'committee' in charge of Lebanese affairs. The central figure was the President, but the other three, all of whom were senior figures in the Party, participated vigorously in the formulation of decisions.²² Only Shihabi was not a member of either of the Party's two commands; but he was a long-standing card-carrying member of the Party. Nevertheless, his inclusion in the committee was due primarily to his institutional affiliation with the armed forces. However, as has been pointed out earlier, this does not mean that he was perceived as the primary representative of the military's interests—a role usually assumed by Lieutenant-General Mustafa Tlas, the Minister of Defence, who at no time was directly involved in the decision-making process with regard to the Lebanese crisis.²³

In the crisis period, the decisional unit varied in size from the four original members of the 'committee' in Decisions Five, Six, Seven and Eight to a larger unit, approximating to a 'decision-making Cabinet' in Decisions Four, Nine and Ten.²⁴ The latter

consisted of the key members of the political leadership numbering nine. This '*ad hoc* Cabinet' was chaired by the President, and the membership included Khaddam, Jamil, Ayyoubi, al-Ahmar, Bajbouj, Mohsen, Shihabi and al-Kholi.

In the post-crisis period, Decision Eleven seems to have been taken solely by the President. There are no indications that anyone else but Asad participated in the decision to halt the Syrian offensive on 30 September and offer peace talks to the Palestinians. Decision Twelve, involving the Syrian second offensive, was taken by the four members of the decision-making 'committee', whereas Decision Thirteen to accept Saudi Arabia's invitation to attend the Riyadh mini-summit, which constituted a fundamental shift in policy, was taken by the nine members of the 'decision-making Cabinet' (see Table 10.1).

The findings, therefore, seem to suggest that Syria's consultative and decisional units increased as tension heightened. The only exception to this general statement was Decision Thirteen in the post-crisis period, which involved the widest institutional consultation, and was taken by the nine-member 'decision-making Cabinet'. Another interesting conclusion relates to the pattern of authority in the consultative and decisional units. In the decisions that were perceived to be consequential (i.e. strategic), especially Decisions Nine and Ten in the crisis period, entailing the use of force against the Leftist forces, and Decision Thirteen in the post-crisis period to attend the mini summit in Riyadh, authority was markedly decentralised. However, the rest of the decisions, spanning the three periods, but nevertheless, perceived to be less important (i.e. tactical), showed that authority was centralised around the person of the President and the other three members of the '*ad hoc* decision-making committee' chosen by Asad himself. The only exception to this general rule was strategic Decision Four to commit the Yarmouk Brigade of the Palestine Liberation Army to Lebanon. In this particular case, there was a clear consensus among the decision-makers behind the President's position. Finally, no discernible increase in the influence of the defence establishment seems to have occurred prior to Decisions Four, Nine and Ten in the crisis period and Decision Twelve in the post-crisis period, all of which involved the military—security issue—area. Apart from Chief of Staff Shihabi and Chief of the Air Force Jamil, who participated in the making of the entire spectrum of decisions, the key membership

of the leadership taking responsibility for the 'military' decisions were all civilian members of the Baath Party, except for al-Kholi. Moreover, apart from Shihabi and al-Kholi, the key decision-makers were all members of one or the other of the two Party Commands. In fact, the civilian/military ratio of 6:3 remained constant in all the crucial (strategic) decisions, whether or not these involved the military/security issue-area. Furthermore, as stated earlier, the Defence Minister, General Tlas, did not participate in the formulation of the 'military/security' decisions. However, in his other role as a member of the National Command of the Baath Party, Tlas was involved in the consultative process for the consequential strategic decisions.

While the influence of the defence establishment does not seem to have increased during the formulation process of the 'military/security' decisions, military representation in the decision-making process as a whole was widened significantly after the initial transformation of the 'normal' non-crisis (ante-crisis) situation into the pre-crisis period. During this period, two out of the four members of the decisional unit (Jamil and Shihabi), who also acted as the basic consultative unit, were active military commanders. Even when later on in the pre-crisis period, the consultative group was increased to eleven, the defence establishment continued its relative prominence through the membership of Jamil, Shihabi, al-Kholi and Rifaat al-Asad.

Alternatives: Search and Evaluation

According to a close and authoritative observer of Syria's decision-making process:

Very rarely, indeed extremely rarely, would the President take an important decision without prior evaluation and consultations within the Government and sometimes from outside it, such as university professors. Consultations usually centre on important members of the Party and sometimes the Progressive National Front. If there is no time, he will certainly make a point of at least contacting by phone some members of the party leadership. He rarely makes an instinctive decision. This was particularly true in the Lebanese crisis. Indeed, as the crisis worsened and the possibility of war increased, the

evaluation process was widened and was made more rigorous.²⁵

Thus, a thorough evaluation-search process seems to have characterised *all* the consequential strategic decisions—Decisions Four, Nine and Ten in the crisis period and Decision Thirteen in the post-crisis period. For example, although the level of perceived threat abruptly increased in the first week of January 1976, and although the Syrian decision-makers were operating under a constant barrage of requests and pleas from the Moslem forces in Lebanon to intervene, the decision to despatch the Yarmouk Brigade of the Palestine Liberation Army to Lebanon on 18 January was made after lengthy and wide-ranging consultations and careful evaluations. In his important speech on 20 July 1976, President Asad described the decision process which preceded the commitment of the PLA troops:

It goes without saying that the matter was thoroughly discussed. We discussed all aspects of the situation and the possibility of war breaking out between us and Israel. There were two choices laid before us then: either not to intervene and the Resistance in Lebanon would collapse and be wiped out as it was judged in the light of the military position that prevailed and all those rescue appeals, or to intervene and rescue the Resistance but face the possibility of war. We discussed the possibility of war, and found out that there was such a possibility but not by necessity, for reasons that I do not wish to elaborate in detail. However, the conspiracy in Lebanon was designed to realise such objectives as would have been completely reversed if Israel stood in our way and war broke out. All the same, the war remained a possibility but it also remained possible that war would not break out. So we decided to enter and rescue the Resistance.²⁶

Similarly, the decision to commit Syrian regular forces in Lebanon on 31 May 1976 was taken after a seemingly thorough capability analysis with regard to possible Israeli and Iraqi responses.²⁷ Moreover, the decision was implemented only after Syrian intentions were communicated to the United States and through the Americans to Israel, to the relevant Arab states, to the Lebanese leaders, and to Arafat and the Palestinian leader-

ship.²⁸ Important responses were immediately forthcoming. On the very day of the invasion, a United States official said that 'the Syrians should be congratulated for acting to protect some endangered Christian communities and for seeking to press all sides in Lebanon to observe a cease-fire'.²⁹ Even more significant was Israel's reaction. According to Prime Minister Rabin, 'Israel was in no hurry to intervene in Lebanon'.³⁰ Evidence also suggests that a similarly careful evaluation-search process preceded the Syrian decision on 28 September 1976 to launch a massive offensive against the Leftist forces in the Lebanese mountains.³¹ Thus, the findings seem to suggest that as the crisis heightened and intensified, and the probability of military involvement increased, the search-evaluation process was correspondingly expanded.

The only other decision where a thorough and careful evaluation of alternatives was involved was Decision Thirteen leading to the Syrian acceptance of Saudi Arabia's invitation to attend the mini-summit in Riyadh. While this decision occurred in the post-crisis period, when the level of perceived threat had considerably declined, nevertheless, it was an important and consequential strategic decision, constituting 'a major change of policy necessitating a rational and rigorous approach'.³² Indeed, according to the Minister of Information, Ahmad Iskander:

All the important (strategic) decisions were fateful decisions (Qararat Masiriyah) concerned with fundamental Syrian principles that had to be pursued in spite of all difficulties. This does not, however, mean that we minimised these difficulties and the political complexities. On the contrary, the Syrian leadership always endeavoured to examine the situation thoroughly and to communicate and explain Syria's decision to other relevant governments.³³

In contrast, Decisions One, Two, Three and Five, involving the despatch of peace missions to Lebanon, and Decision Eight, necessitating the concentration of more troops on the border with Lebanon, as well as Decision Twelve leading to the second major offensive after the failure of the peace talks, were all 'decisions that the political leadership would be normally expected to make, given the prevailing circumstances. There was no need for wide-ranging discussions, as these decisions were dictated by Syria's

role in the area and with regard to Lebanon.³⁴ In these cases, therefore, decisions seem to have been made according to generally accepted norms of behaviour approximating to standard operating procedures.

The three remaining decisions seem to have all been characterised by a cognitive process of choice, resulting primarily from personal and/or ideological impulses. Thus, Decision Six to halt the advance of the Lebanese Arab Army against the presidential palace of Suleiman Franjeh was motivated by the Syrian fundamental value to stop, at any cost, the total defeat of one or the other of the conflicting parties, for fear of consequent Lebanese disintegration. The same ideological impulse motivated Decision Seven to sever arms supplies to the Leftists, although in this particular instance the personal hostility existing between President Asad and Kamal Jumblatt was a further motivation. Decision Eleven to stop the advance of the victorious Syrian troops in the Lebanese mountains seems to have resulted from the Syrian President's personal distaste for fighting and killing fellow Arabs, especially Palestinians.³⁵ In all three cases, therefore, the decisions were instinctive and immediate, motivated by personal and ideological impulses.

Finally, certain general conclusions can be ascertained from the preceding analysis. First the Syrian decision-makers seem to have been aware of the complexity of their environment. They fully appreciated the variety of interests operating within and outside Lebanon. However, they seem to have somewhat exaggerated the ability of the United States to manipulate events.³⁶ This was probably due to the persistence of the 'international imperialist-Zionist' paradigm in Syrian perceptions. Secondly, the rational choice decisions, i.e. the crucial Decisions Four, Nine, Ten and Thirteen were the outcome of lengthy and exhaustive meetings in which all the high-level political interests participated. It is also worth noting that three of these four decisions (Four, Nine, Ten) constituted the strategic decisions of the crisis period. Thirdly, there is abundant evidence that Syria's decision-making sessions were dominated by a concern for long-term rather than short-lived solutions.³⁷ Indeed, while meetings were held to evaluate developing events, and as such immediate specific threats were discussed, these were 'analysed within the much larger strategic and ideological concerns (al-qadhaya al-aqaidiya) of Lebanon's unity and Syria's vital interests'.³⁸ Fourthly, only Decision Eight

to concentrate more troops in al-Masna' region on the border with Lebanon could be considered somewhat risky, since the intention was not transmitted to Israel through the United States.³⁹ In the potentially explosive decisions involving military operations, i.e. Decisions Four, Nine, Ten and Twelve, risk factors seem to have been thoroughly evaluated and where possible neutralised before the implementation of the decisions.⁴⁰ The same is true with Decision Thirteen to accept Saudi Arabia's invitation to attend the mini-summit in Riyadh. There was little doubt that in the wake of the humiliating defeat of the Leftists in the Lebanese mountains, President Asad's bargaining position in the summit was considerably strengthened. In the other decisions, the element of risk was insignificant, given the prevalent configuration of forces and the balance of available capabilities. Finally, ideological factors pertaining to such aspirational beliefs as the unity of Lebanon, the historical indivisibility of Syria and Lebanon and Arab unity constituted most potent motivating forces in Syria's decision-making throughout the Lebanese civil war.

NOTES

1. Interview with President Asad in *Events* (London) 1 October 1976, p. 19.
2. *Al-Hawadith* (Beirut) 26 June 1975.
3. *Events* (London) 1 October 1976, p. 20.
4. *SWB*, ME/5009/A/17, 17 September 1975.
5. *SWB*, ME/5267/A/6, 23 July 1976.
6. *SWB*, ME/5266/A/11, 22 July 1976.
7. Iskander interview.
8. See *SWB*, ME/5266/A/9/10, 22 July 1976.
9. *SWB*, ME/5267/A/4, 23 July 1976.
10. Assad, *op. cit.*, pp. 10–11.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
12. Interview with Jweijati, and with Mr Mohammed Khidhr, Director-General of the Department of Arab Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who was interviewed on 4 January 1979.
13. Dawoodi interview.
14. Interviews with Iskander, Dawoodi, Jweijati, and al-Khani.
15. Interviews with Iskander, Dawoodi and al-Khani.
16. Interviews with Omran, Jweijati, Dawoodi, Iskander and al-Khani.
17. Interview with Iskander.
18. See Bulloch, *op. cit.*, p. 114; *al-Nahar* (Beirut), 17 February 1976; *New York Times*, 22 February 1976; *al-Anwar* (Beirut) 4 July 1976; *New York Times*, 9 August 1976.

19. See Assad, op. cit., pp. 22–9. This is confirmed by Iskander and Dawoodi.
20. Dawoodi interview, confirmed by Iskander, Jweijati and al-Khani.
21. Dawoodi interview. This assessment was confirmed independently by Iskander and Omran.
22. Dawoodi, Iskander and al-Khani interviews. This was especially true of Khaddam's role.
23. See pp. 70–1.
24. This should be distinguished from the official Cabinet which, according to Iskander, was 'a purely implementative body'.
25. Interview with Dawoodi. These observations were almost precisely echoed by Iskander, Omran and Khidhr.
26. Assad, op. cit., pp. 25–6.
27. *Events* (London) 3 December 1976, p. 20.
28. Interviews with Dawoodi, Iskander, al-Khani and Omran. See also *The Observer* (London) 6 June 1976; *Financial Times* (London) 19 May 1976; *Daily Telegraph* (London) 19 May 1976; Bulloch, op. cit., p. 147.
29. *New York Times*, 2 June 1976.
30. *Guardian* (London) 7 June 1976.
31. *Al-Safir* (Beirut) 29 September 1976; *Guardian* (London) 10 October 1976; *SWB*, ME/5319/A/6–7, 23 September 1976.
32. Iskander interview. Dawoodi, al-Khani and Omran voiced similar opinions.
33. Interview on 13 January 1978.
34. Iskander interview. Omran put it in a slightly different form: 'In such instances, the Syrian responses would be predictable.'
35. This concern was evident earlier on after Syria's military incursion in Lebanon on 1 June 1976. See also *SWB*, ME/5267/A/3, 23 June 1976.
36. Interviews with Iskander and Dawoodi. See also Assad, op. cit., p. 71.
37. See for example Assad, op. cit., pp. 12–20; pp. 43–8; *SWB*, ME/5185/A/6–7, 14 April 1976; *Financial Times* (London) 19 May 1976; *al-Safir* (Beirut), 30 September 1976; *Guardian* (London) 2 October 1976. This was also very evident from the interviews conducted with Dawoodi, Iskander, al-Khani, Omran, Jweijati, Jinan, Khidhr and Nashabi.
38. Iskander interview.
39. Assad, op. cit., pp. 77–9.
40. *Financial Times* (London), 22 January 1976; *New York Times* 2 June 1976; *Guardian* (London) 7 June 1976; Bulloch, op. cit., pp. 107–8 and p. 142; Salibi, op. cit., pp. 157–8; interviews with Iskander, Dawoodi and al-Khani.

11 Epilogue: Syria in Lebanon, 1976–79

Initially, the outcome of the Syrian operation in October and November 1976 seemed conclusive. During that time, it looked as though the Syrians were able to terminate the civil war, thereby resolving the value threat. As indicated, this was done by a combination of military and diplomatic means. The Syrians first militarily intervened in Lebanon in June 1976. However, a total military defeat was inflicted on the Moslem–Palestinian forces only in September–October 1976. The Syrian leaders then supplemented the military effort by the skilful manipulation of the diplomatic instrument at the Riyadh conference, the results of which legitimised their presence in Lebanon.

The successful conclusion of the crisis was not only evident in operational terms but was also pervasive in the perceptions of the Syrian decision-makers. In a speech in March 1977, President Asad recounted the Syrian achievement in Lebanon:

Within the framework of Pan-Arab action, Syria extended its great assistance to Lebanon and to the Palestine Revolution during their ordeal in Lebanon. This great assistance was among the most brilliant achievements of Syria and the Arab nation. This assistance was able to stop the fighting and foil the plot, with its great dimensions. It was able to save lives, prevent partition, stop the exodus of Lebanese and Palestinians from Lebanon, and repatriate hundreds of thousands of refugees to Lebanon. It was also able to prevent the liquidation of the Palestinian Resistance in Lebanon, which was designed to take place directly through Israel. We note with pleasure that the situation in Lebanon has begun to return to normal. We affirm that *the outcome* was a victory over the plot, a victory for every sincere Lebanese, a victory for every sincere Palestinian, and a victory for every sincere Arab. As far as Syria is concerned, our

political line and principled attitudes were not affected by the accusations which we faced during the events in Lebanon. Our attitudes towards our nation's causes will remain firm and uncompromising.¹ (my italics)

President Asad's obvious euphoria was by no means exaggerated. Domestically, the position of the Baathist political leadership had been cemented, and the country's economic situation had been revived by the reactivation of Saudi and Kuwaiti aid in the wake of the Riyadh summit. In Lebanon, apart from the area south of the Litani River bordering on Israel, Syrian troops were in complete control of the entire country, and the Syrian decision-makers had been institutionalised as the final arbiters of power in Lebanon's domestic politics. In the Arab world, the Syrian leadership emerged from its successful involvement in the Lebanese conflict as a pivotal actor in inter-Arab politics, establishing a perceptible preponderance over its bitter Baathist rival in Iraq. Internationally, Syria's prestige as a consequential state in the Middle East soared appreciably, and the status of Syrian decision-makers, particularly that of President Asad, as rational and pragmatic, yet decisive and authoritative, leaders was considerably enhanced.

The Syrian claim that normality had returned to Lebanon was, however, precipitant. Soon the cease-fire began to break, first in isolated incidents and then with an ever increasing frequency and intensity in various parts of Lebanon. By mid-1977 clashes between the rival Lebanese factions had become an almost daily occurrence. This was particularly true in the south of Lebanon where Israel was actively backing the Christians against the Palestinians in what was hitherto called Fatahland. Encouraged by Israel's support, the Maronite militias to the north, especially al-Kata'ib and Chamoun's NLP proceeded to publicly voice their displeasure with the Syrian occupation, and began to demand the 'immediate withdrawal of the alien forces from the homeland'. The Christians, who had tactically allied themselves with the Syrians in the latter's offensive against the Leftists in 1976, had soon realised that the Syrians were indeed determined to prevent first the partitioning of Lebanon and second the total defeat of one indigenous party at the hands of the other. Not content with merely sharing power, however, the Christian Maronite leadership reactivated their struggle against the 'old enemy' and

proceeded with their plans to effect a *de facto* partitioning of the country, so that by 1978 the Christian area of Mount Lebanon was beginning to acquire all the social and economic characteristics of an autonomous political entity.² Adding to this increasing anarchy were the divisions inside the Palestinian movement which soon erupted into violence through fierce clashes between the Syrian-controlled al-Saiqa on the one hand and the Iraqi-backed Arab Liberation Movement on the other hand. Thus, by early 1978 it had become inescapably clear to the Syrians that achieving Lebanese security and stability was as distant then as it was when the Syrian tanks first rolled into Lebanon.

Syria's mounting troubles in Lebanon abruptly increased when Israel invaded Southern Lebanon in mid-March. Perceiving the Syrian lack of response as a clear sign of weakness, the NLP and al-Kata'ib militias launched a fierce offensive against Moslem and Palestinian forces in which over a hundred were killed. Al-Kata'ib also began to attack other Christian groups that were perceived to be pro-Syrian; while NLP fighters were openly and enthusiastically collaborating with the Israelis in the south. Naturally the Syrians could not tolerate such a blatant and dangerous challenge to their authority for very long, and the catalyst for the almost inevitable explosion occurred on 13 June 1978 when al-Kata'ib militia attacked the home of the Christian pro-Syrian leader Tony Franjeh killing him, his wife, his daughter and thirty-two of his followers. The Syrians did not take long to retaliate. A heavy bombardment, including rocket fire, from the Syrian armour mercilessly pounded the Christian area of East Beirut, the Syrians demanding the complete submission of the militant Maronite forces. The Christians, increasingly supported by Israel, were however in no mood to negotiate let alone surrender. On the contrary, they defiantly reiterated their demands for an immediate Syrian withdrawal. Even the clergy, who, since October 1976, had been relatively conciliatory towards the Syrians, began to exhibit increasingly militant anti-Syrian orientations in the wake of the Syrian bombardment. The Permanent Secretariat of the Lebanese Clergy, a group representing the Maronite League, the Roman Catholic Higher Council, the Greek Orthodox Lebanese League, the Syriac community and the Higher Council of the Syriac Orthodox called for a general strike 'to make the world listen to Christian demands for the withdrawal of the Syrian forces from Christian areas'.³ Given this

mounting polarisation, the fighting continued to intensify, so that by the end of September 1978, Syrian losses since the beginning of July were estimated to be approximately 1,500 dead.

In an effort to break the impasse, President Sarkis travelled to Damascus in early October with a number of compromise proposals. Under increasing international and Middle Eastern pressure, and alarmed by the mounting human and material cost of Syria's less than successful effort to defeat the Christian militias, President Asad decided on 7 October to call a halt to the daily bombardment of Christian areas. In a statement issued before the departure of the Lebanese President to Beirut, President Asad reiterated Syria's position with regard to the Lebanese conflict:

Some of those who are obstructing security [in Lebanon] are placing the Lebanese President in a difficult position. It seems to me as an Arab citizen and not as a Syrian official, that they want to say that President Sarkis is the President of the Lebanese Republic, but that he must exercise his authority as the President of the Republic over the other side in Lebanon, not over them. When I say 'they', I mean the [Christian] militias, who are playing havoc with the security situation. . . . I say that they—the militias—must determine what the interests of Lebanon are and must work only for those interests. Nobody is entitled to score illusory victories over others. It is Lebanon, and not any given side in Lebanon, that must triumph.⁴

A week after the cease-fire, the Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia, Syria, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar, UAE, and Sudan, the seven countries involved in the maintenance of the Arab peace-keeping force in Lebanon, met in Beit al-Din, twenty miles south east of Beirut to try and solve the Lebanese stalemate. The meeting lasted for three days, at the end of which, the Ministers reaffirmed their support for Syria's 'peace-keeping' role in Lebanon. They pledged to neutralise the Rightist Lebanese Christians and, if necessary, to use force to end their collaboration with Israel, and they emphasised the need for the preservation of Lebanon's unity and independence. They also affirmed the necessity for the 'exact, accurate and thorough application of the Riyadh and Cairo summits' resolutions (of

October 1976)',⁵ which inferred the continuation of the Syrian role in Lebanon.

In response to this affirmation of the Syrian presence in Lebanon from countries who were all moderate in their foreign policy orientations and thus expected to be sympathetic to the Christian cause in 'normal' times, the Syrian troops handed over three key positions in East Beirut to Saudi and Sudanese units, who would act as a buffer between the Christians and the Syrians. Endeavouring to emphasise Syria's efforts at conciliation, Foreign Minister Abd al-Halim Khaddam reminded the Lebanese:

There have been attempts to make them (the Maronites) believe that Syria wants to destroy the Christians. Is there anybody who cares for the Christians more than Hafiz al-Assad? Is there anybody, stupid or sensible, who can believe that there can be a person who loves his Christian and Moslem brothers in Lebanon more than the man who adopted a decision under the worst Arab and international conditions to enter Lebanon and lift the blockade on Zahle, Amshit and Qubbayat?⁶

Syria's efforts at conciliation and the legitimisation of its role in Lebanon by the Beit al-Din meeting did lead to a perceptible decline in hostilities. However, to many Christians, the redeployment of the troops of the Arab peace-keeping force was seen not as a Syrian 'concession' but as a 'retreat' constituting 'the first step towards the liberation of Lebanon from all foreign forces'.⁷ Indeed, it was not long before hostilities erupted once again, and Rightist leaders, particularly Chamoun, reactivated their earlier demands for the complete removal of the Syrian forces. After the Syrian shelling of the Christian sectors of Badaro, Dirwaneh, Ain Rumaneh and Sin al-Fil, in early January 1979, the NLP leader in an uncompromising statement said: 'For God's sake, let them leave the country, for this will be the only means of keeping some feeling of friendship between the Lebanese and Syrian peoples. There will be peace in Lebanon if they withdraw, because all the troubles we have seen have been created by Syrian policy.'⁸ This statement reflected the durability of the attitudinal schism between the Christians and the Syrians, and it was certainly manifested in the continuing clashes that pervaded the early

months of 1979. In January alone, over thirty people were killed and at least a hundred were injured. In mid-February, the Lebanese Prime Minister, Mr Salim al-Hos, narrowly escaped injury when snipers opened fire on his motorcade near the dividing line between East and West Beirut. This occurred only a week after the Prime Minister had been trapped for over two hours in his offices by the fighting between Christian militias and Syrian forces. These intermittent clashes continued well into March and April, and they were exacerbated by the growing feud between the Franjeh clan and the other Christian groups. Thus, by mid-1979, the Syrians had become bogged down in a morale-draining occupation, involved in increasingly unpopular and costly battles, risking an ill-prepared confrontation with Israel, unable to extricate themselves from the civil war, yet equally impotent in effecting an enduring resolution of the conflict.

Two major problem areas mitigated against the success of the Syrian venture. In the first place, because of Lebanon's confessional system, domestic division and inter-communal hostility had pervaded Lebanese society since independence. Lack of violent eruptions for long periods only meant that antagonisms remained dormant. Thus, conflict was embodied in the very structure of the Lebanese political and social systems, and consequently an enduring resolution of the conflict would be achieved only through dismantling the existing system and the creation of a totally new order. In other words, as long as the confessional system continued to exist, inter-communal conflict would persist. Yet, the declared goals of the Syrian intervention, which, as has been pointed out earlier in this study, were based on fundamental Syrian values, were aimed at only modifying, but essentially preserving, the existing Lebanese order. Egalitarian though such a solution might be, it was bound to prove counter-productive to the permanent resolution of the conflict. The Syrian leaders soon discovered this simple truth when their efforts throughout 1977 to create a national Lebanese Army collapsed in the spring of 1978 with the eruption of hostilities and schisms from within the ranks of 'the new military generation'. The Syrians, moreover, were resolutely against the partitioning of the country, and were determined to prevent one party scoring an outright military victory over the other. Two eventualities that paradoxically could have resolved the long-standing conflict. It

could therefore be argued that Syrian motivating values were, in a sense, instrumental in prolonging the conflict in Lebanon.

The second reason for Syria's lack of success in resolving the Lebanese conflict relates to the activities of Israel in the area. From the very beginning of their intervention, the Syrians had never been in complete control of Lebanon. The area south of the Litani River represented to the Israelis a strategic reserve to be occupied only by friendly elements. This Israeli assessment was communicated to the Syrians as early as January 1977 when the Syrian-dominated Arab peace-keeping force moved into the town of Nabatiyeh in Southern Lebanon to stop the fighting between Christians and Leftists. Israel warned Syria in no uncertain terms to withdraw its troops immediately or risk a confrontation with Israel. Very soon after this threat, the Syrian troops duly pulled back. Since then, even in cases of blatant Israeli military operations in the area, the Syrian troops have been kept well away from the south. While this represents a rational strategic decision on the part of the Syrian leadership, based on a correct analysis of existing capabilities, Syrian inactivity and lack of response to Israeli operations in the area has had a profound psychological impact on the Lebanese combatants themselves. The aura of overwhelming superiority, even invincibility, which characterised Syria's swift military advance in the autumn of 1976 had by mid-1979 almost completely disappeared. Indeed, the Syrian reluctance to become involved in a military clash with the Israelis served to highlight the vulnerability of Syria's position in Lebanon, a vulnerability which was bound to increase the confidence and self-assurance of the militant anti-Syrian forces in Lebanon, particularly as these had been assured of Israel's commitment to their cause. Thus, during the Syrian bombardment of Christian positions in Eastern Beirut in July 1978, seven Israeli warplanes flying at supersonic speed swooped over Beirut at rooftop level. According to the Chief of Israeli military intelligence, Major-General Shlomo Gazit, the Israeli action was designed 'to boost the morale of the Christian forces'.⁹ The following day, Israel publicly announced that it had reinforced its forces along the border with Lebanon. Similarly, in October 1978, Israeli naval vessels bombarded Syrian and Palestinian positions in South Beirut for over an hour in a clear effort to force the Syrians to halt their own bombardment of Christian areas.

Professor Moshe Arens, the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee of the Israeli Knesset commented: 'the Israeli naval raid was a clear message to the Syrians and should have given them food for thought. It was an indication that Israel will not stand by and watch them finish off the Christians in Beirut.'¹⁰ In a separate statement, the Deputy Prime Minister, Professor Yigal Yadin, said that 'in spite of the political limitations (i.e. the Camp David agreement), Israel remained firm in its commitment not to allow the destruction of the Christian minority in Lebanon. Without our continuous aid, they would not be able to continue fighting. . . . Do not ask me what the aid consists of, but it makes all the difference.'¹¹ In the first six months of 1979, Israel, responding to Palestinian guerrilla activity, carried out three major operations in Lebanon, the most elaborate of which was the week-long air and naval bombardment of the Lebanese southern coastline in April, in which over fifteen people were killed with extensive damage to property and buildings.

Israel also actively supported the Christian forces of Major Sa'ad Haddad in effectively resisting the introduction of the Lebanese Army into the Southern Lebanon. After the set-back of spring 1978, the Syrians succeeded a year later in creating a small Lebanese Army unit, composed of Christians and Moslems, which was meant to be the nucleus of the envisaged professional, non-sectarian Lebanese armed forces. Naturally it was important for Damascus and the Sarkis Government to quickly prove the viability of this exercise in national unity. Thus, responding to the increasing anarchy in Southern Lebanon, the Syrians, somewhat precipitantly, despatched the Lebanese Army unit in April 1979 to the south to operate alongside the United Nations forces in re-establishing governmental authority in the region. Major Haddad, however, announced that he would resist the deployment of the Lebanese force, claiming that it was a mere puppet of the Syrians, and in order to emphasise the point, the Rightist militia under his command proceeded to shell United Nations positions south of the Litani River, thus effectively preventing the Lebanese Army unit from entering the region. Not content with this operation alone, the Major announced the establishment of an 'Independent South Lebanon', and pointedly declared: 'Our intention will be to liberate all Lebanon from all the invaders and all those strangers who have bad intentions against Lebanon.'¹² Whatever their merit, these claims tended to highlight the

impotence of the Syrian regime against Lebanese fissiparous forces that are supported by Israel.

This then was the extent of Syria's dilemma in Lebanon in 1979.¹³ The Syrians were indeed torn between on the one hand ideological and political commitments that prescribed a specific course of action, and on the other hand developing environmental imperatives that necessitated a different, almost contradictory, Syrian response. On the one hand, the Syrians were committed to safeguarding the unity of Lebanon and preventing the subjugation of one local party to the other, yet on the other hand the developing events after June 1976 increasingly suggested that it would be almost impossible for such goals to achieve an enduring resolution to the conflict that would substantively serve Syrian interests. On the contrary, as has already been pointed out, it could be argued that these Syrian goals, if anything, would only serve to prolong the conflict. Irrespective of its ultimate results, Syria's military occupation between 1976 and 1979 showed the perils of such an operation even though to the Syrian leaders, it was motivated by clear, fundamental, and on the whole, egalitarian values.

NOTES

1. *SWB*, ME/5457/A/1, 8 March, 1977.
2. *Le Monde* (Paris) 16 February, 1978.
3. *Guardian* (London) 12 September, 1978; *International Herald Tribune* (Paris) 12 September, 1978.
4. *SWB*, ME/5942/A/2, 14 October, 1978.
5. *Financial Times* (London) 18 October, 1978; *International Herald Tribune* (Paris) 18 October, 1978.
6. *SWB*, ME/5947/A/7, 20 October, 1978.
7. *Events* (London) 3 November, 1978, p. 13.
8. *Guardian* (London) 9 January, 1979; *Egyptian Gazette* (Cairo) 9 January, 1979.
9. *The Times* (London) 8 July, 1978.
10. *Guardian* (London) 7 October, 1978.
11. *International Herald Tribune* (Paris), 7 October, 1978; *Sunday Times* (London) 8 October, 1978. This was confirmed by Dany Chamoun, the son of the N.L.P. leader, who admitted in August 1978 that the Christians received aid from Israel and that the connection dated back to "early 1976, when we could not get arms from anywhere else", see *Events* (London) 11 August 1978. Indeed, this "connection" prompted the Lebanese Ambassador to the United Nations, Ghassan Tweini, himself a Christian, to

accuse the Christian leaders of becoming hostages to Israel. See *Arabia and the Gulf* (London) 14 August 1978.

12. *Guardian* (London) 19 April 1979.

13. For a fuller account of the preceding analysis, see Adeed I. Dawisha, 'Syria in Lebanon: Assad's Vietnam?', *Foreign Policy* no. 33 (Winter 1978–9) pp. 135–50.

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